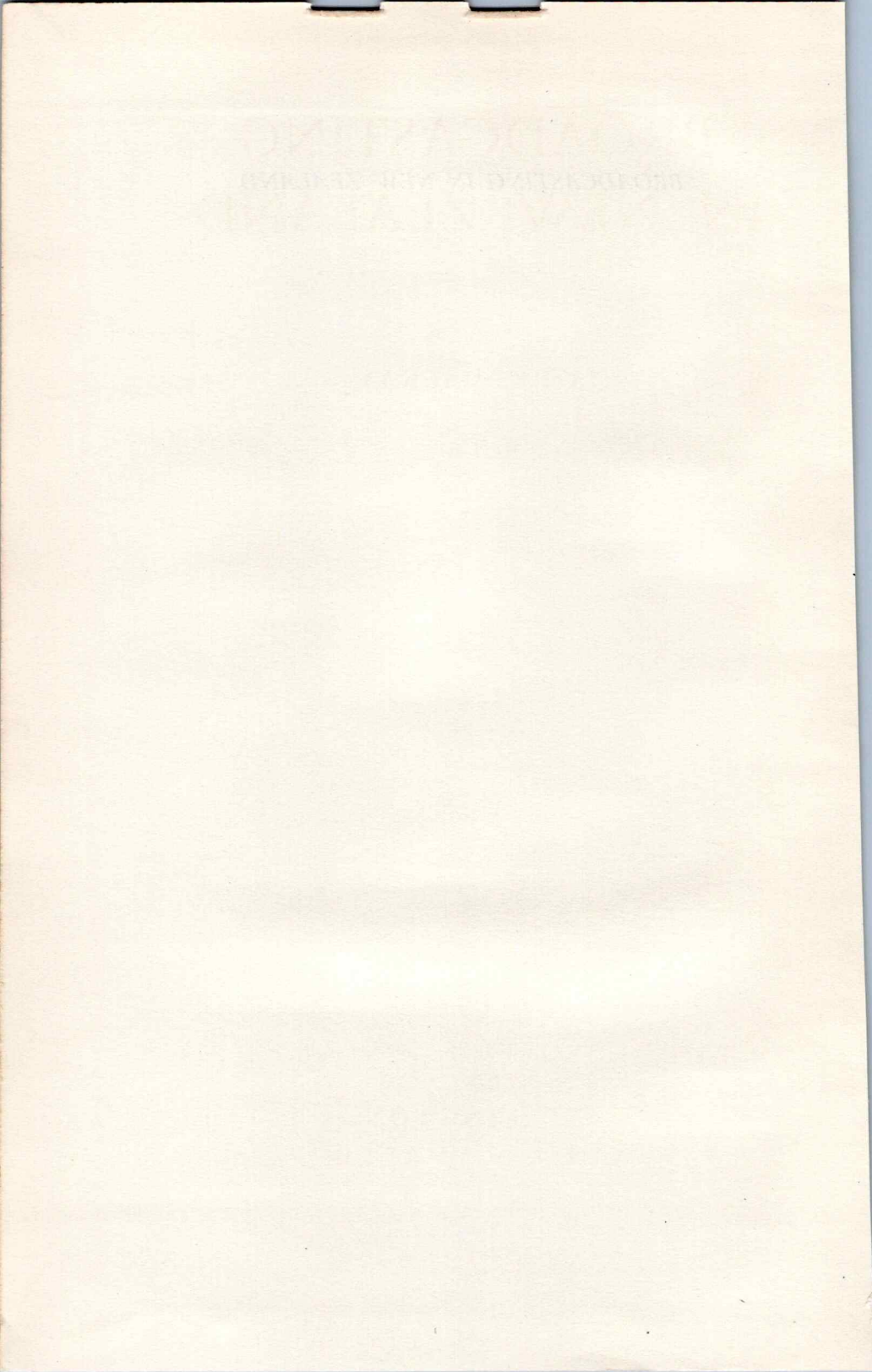


*BROADCASTING IN NEW ZEALAND*





# BROADCASTING IN NEW ZEALAND

*By*  
IAN K. MACKAY



WELLINGTON  
A. H. & A. W. REED

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## *Preface*

MY INTEREST in broadcasting dates from 1932, when it was still legal for private enterprise to engage in the transmission of music and drama, talks, and general radio entertainment. Broadcasting in those days was a hobby for amateurs, and a side-line for a few pioneers in the business world with vision and skill to adapt their knowledge to the technical needs of radio at that time. Most cities and towns possessed radio clubs, and Nelson had its group of enthusiasts who operated a small twenty-five watt transmitter licensed under the call sign of 2ZR, now included as 2XN in the New Zealand Broadcasting Service network.

I attended one of the early 2ZR public meetings to criticise the policy of the management, and found myself projected on to the committee to try and do better. . . . I am still trying. I have grown up with broadcasting, worked under the various systems, and been personally associated with its triumphs and depressions—and there have been plenty of both. In all its growing pains New Zealand broadcasting has been the servant of “The Public”, taking all the kicks this exacting body of humanity can deal it out.

When it became necessary to join the Civil Service to continue a career in broadcasting, I did so, but had to step back a few paces to start again as junior announcer. In eight years I became the “Senior Executive of the Commercial Division of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service” (a title typifying the Public Service control of the department) and held this position for some years, during which there were many changes in the policy and administration of broadcasting in this country. Finally, becoming dissatisfied with certain administrative trends, and after much soul-searching, I resigned—to make a new start in the wider and more competitive field of Australian broadcasting.

If the reader finds this history of events tangled with politics and politicians, it is because broadcasting has been guided, managed, pigeon-holed, and debated over by politicians from the day the University students first experimented back in 1921. Politicians were timid then, and remained so for a long time, leaving their mark of favour or disfavour according to the personalities involved. New Zealand broadcasting has been a State monopoly since 1936, but prior to that its welfare was in the

hands of various Governments, and any account of these years would be incomplete without an examination of the political associations of the times.

My broadcasting experience has brought me in close relation with most of the events described in the following pages, but I have endeavoured to present a detached viewpoint. The actual narrative is the story of New Zealand broadcasting, the views and opinions are my own.

IAN K. MACKAY

*Sydney, Australia*

1953



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# I

## *What's Wrong with Broadcasting?*

IN THESE pages I have sought to relate something of the story of broadcasting in New Zealand—its triumphs and failures—because it is from the past that we can seek guidance for the future. Such a study will yet enable us to develop a New Zealand system of broadcasting, not as we have at present—a conglomeration of twenty-eight stations, many of them duplicating functions, overlapping in coverage, and with a politically imposed administrative setup that has destroyed competition.

At the outset it is necessary to examine the broadcasting service as it exists to-day; and let me say that the New Zealand Broadcasting Service has performed reasonably well within the limits of its shifting target and in some cases under great difficulty. Nevertheless the fact remains that for many and varied reasons—and they will be examined in later chapters—the service possesses many weaknesses and the removal of these would enable our broadcasters to give a more efficient and varied service than is available to-day.

What is the nature of these shackles? In the main they comprise the complete lack of listener research, absence of a news service worthy of the name, the financing of the National Orchestra entirely from listener funds, the timidity of alleged controversial programmes, discussions and talks, the *New Zealand Listener's* aloofness from broadcasting affairs, financial reticence and the relegation of the Commercial Division to the role of "hewers of wood and drawers of water".

It is necessary that we examine these important issues at the outset before turning back the pages and dealing with the events of yesterday.

### *Listener Research*

From a broadcasting point of view it is desirable to know:

- Who listens to the programmes and from what stations?
- What do the listeners prefer?
- Who are the listeners?
- Why do they listen?

Listener research is regarded as indispensable in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia, but not in New Zealand where the Broadcasting Service does not know what the listener requires and it has been suggested that they do not wish to know.

An article in the *Otago Daily Times* commenting on this strange lack of enthusiasm for listener research noted:

"Is it because the executive strings of the department are held by YA officers who fear that a survey would disclose to the public that the YA stations command an infinitesimal audience? Private surveys taken on programmes on average evenings from Wellington stations showed that 2YA had an audience of less than two per cent. . . ."

The writer was obviously referring to regular listener surveys carried out by one of New Zealand's largest advertisers with world-wide experience in marketing and research.

In broadcasting circles it is no secret that the proportion of city listeners who depend on the YA stations for entertainment is small, but no one would suggest they scrap their programmes and present popular entertainment for the N.Z.B.S. is under obligation to provide for the tastes of all listeners. Nevertheless listeners might take cognisance of the fact that stations which provide entertainment paid for by the licence fees may not be satisfying their requirements. To quote the *Otago Daily Times* again:

"An enquiry into listeners' preferences and prejudices should be made by the N.Z.B.S. Listener research, properly conducted, would tell the best and the worst both about the public taste and listeners' 'reactions'—or lack of them—to the national stations' programmes. With that information before them the authorities could proceed more accurately than at present to provide a service which had due regard to popular choice without debasing the service to a vulgar eclecticism. . . ."

There are many within the department who say that the reason why there is no listener research is because a small group do not want tangible evidence of the popularity of the ZB stations against the YA stations, or to have proof that listening to ZB stations may have declined since the amalgamation. Broadcasting in New Zealand is Big Business. On the commercial side alone it has a turnover approaching half a million pounds per



annum, yet it gives no guarantee of circulation, and unlike a newspaper the advertiser has no means of assessing his cost-per-thousand audience. The N.Z.B.S. cannot continue to be out of step with modern developments and run the risk of wasting large sums of listener income and advertising revenue through adopting a hit and miss method of programme expenditure.

Listener research is an integral part of any broadcasting structure, and New Zealand should keep abreast of developments in this field and not, ostrich-like, imagine that it does not exist.

### *That News Service*

In most countries it is recognised that an accurate and efficient news service is an essential function of broadcasting, and stations and networks regard these sessions as primary requirements. This approach to broadcast news is strongly entrenched in most countries, while in Great Britain the evening news sessions comprise the most important service of the day. What about New Zealand? Do broadcasting authorities recognise their responsibility in this very important field? They do not, and I venture an opinion that with the possible exception of South Africa, the news sessions broadcast by the YA stations are the worst in the British Empire and Commonwealth, and that the ZB stations *are the only commercial network in the world with no news sessions whatsoever.*

The main national stations present an evening news session at 9.00 p.m. which is merely a rehash of news that has appeared in the morning and evening papers. This session may be of some interest to listeners in distant isolated areas who do not receive a daily paper but their numbers must be very small indeed. The only other news sessions heard by New Zealand listeners are re-broadcasts from the B.B.C., but, excellent as these are, they should be *supplementary* to the news policy of the N.Z.B.S. It would appear that the N.Z.B.S. possesses neither the facilities nor the inclination to provide news sessions, and it is certainly surprising to know that even to-day much of the material for this nightly session is still supplied by the Information Section of the Tourist and Publicity Department.

In the past, charges have been made that the Labour Government was using this session for political purposes and criticism from press and Parliament certainly indicated a lack of confidence in the source of the material. Checking through my file



of press clippings I find that Parliament discussed this question at some length in September 1947, when members from both sides of the House expressed the hope that the radio news service would be improved. The then Minister (the Hon. Frederick Jones) expressed pleasure at the reception given to the idea that the N.Z.B.S. should improve in this field, adding, "I take it that members will agree with the Government establishing an up-to-date service even if it involved the employment of a fair number of people. I would favour the idea if it could be done without great cost."

In 1953 we are still without an efficient radio news service.

### *Controversy*

Charles A. Siepmann in *Radio's Second Chance* states: "The handling of controversy on the air requires courage, a highly developed sense of social responsibility, and a mature wisdom." New Zealand broadcasting has shown a conspicuous lack of all these qualities. The approach to this problem has been a haphazard one; and it was not until comparatively recently that anything was accomplished. I know it has been stated that because 2YA broadcasts Parliament the service is in effect broadcasting controversy to a greater degree than any other network in the world—but that is begging the question.

I still consider that the authorities in New Zealand should boldly venture into the fields of controversy and follow the lead of networks in other countries. Perplexing problems will arise, but surely these are no reason for marking time; for to over-emphasise the difficulties is merely to shelter behind a convenient alibi for the *status quo*.

During the last two or three years when a degree of controversy has been permitted on the air, it has had a gentle academic quality which with few exceptions has been far removed from the problems of the day. It is current controversy that should have a place in these sessions. If "State Aid to Church Schools" is under examination, why not both sides of the case on the air? When the budget has been presented why not provide time for the Minister of Finance to explain the document, and be followed on the next night by an Opposition reply? I know the presentation of the budget is already broadcast but two opposing views would surely be in the public interest and provide stimulating listening? There is no need to deal with this at length except to say that there is a great deal for the



N.Z.B.S. to accomplish in the realm of controversial broadcasting. The broadcasts should contain "the stuff of life" and not merely dull academic discussions that would not cause one dear old lady to miss a heart beat. To illustrate let me quote from the Annual Report of the N.Z.B.S., year ending March 31, 1949:

"Discussions were presented from the four national stations at regular times, generally weekly, during the greater part of the year. Among the subjects discussed have been: Worker Participation in Management, the Drift to the Cities, Tourist Traffic in New Zealand, New Zealand's Defence, Trends in Music, Education, the Use of Leisure, Cancer, the United Nations, Films, New Zealand Writers, New Zealand Architecture, Advertising, Art, Sport, Displaced Persons, National Fitness, Lodgings, Household Deliveries, the Public Service, Trade Unionism and Radio."

See what I mean? The very titles indicate an air of restraint. Subsequent reports do not list any subjects at all so let us hope there have been improvements.

These programmes may have been interesting, but are they controversial? Discussions of this nature should not be confused with live vigorous controversial discussions on topics which exercise the minds of listeners *at the time*. The B.B.C. has been handling these broadcasts since 1928 and the democratic processes of the British Isles do not appear to have weakened as a result.

Why not a real controversial topic each week? I would advocate that the N.Z.B.S. should, within certain obvious limits, be as free as the columns of the press to discuss any controversial topic of the day without surrendering to pressure or becoming overwhelmed with responsibilities. After all Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia all regard free discussion on the radio as the essence of democracy, and topical controversial subjects, as separate from mere discussions, are part of the regular programme schedule.

Why not New Zealand?

I sincerely hope this will not be delayed much longer with the excuse of having to "tread carefully because of the problems involved". The only real problem is whether the N.Z.B.S. will emulate the policies of overseas broadcasting authorities or

whether in yet another field of activity it is to remain indifferent to progress.

There can be no middle course.

### *The "New Zealand Listener"*

The *New Zealand Listener* would certainly provide a fertile field for an investigator and may I suggest he first studies the initial three lines of the 1951 Annual Report, the whole of which occupies a mere ten lines. The reference reads:

"The aim of the *New Zealand Listener* apart from its main function of providing listeners with complete programme information, was to assist and supplement the essential work of radio in the life of New Zealand."

I presume this also remains unaltered yet an examination of an average *Listener* reveals the following space allocated:

Programme listings	.. ..	39.2%
Non broadcasting material		16.5%
Advertising	.. ..	32.4%
YA publicity material	..	8.4%
ZB publicity material	..	3.5%

I fear the *Listener* is seeking a reputation for a literary journal and the "Letters from Listeners" would bear out this contention for in the main they deal with general topics. Before listing these, however, let me quote from a recent editorial which appeared in the official journal of the Australian Broadcasting Commission:

"Correspondence columns are a fairly accurate guide on two things—the editorial standard of the paper and the type of person who reads it. . . . Correspondence columns of this journal are open to any reader who wishes to comment on its contents or on matters relating to broadcasting."

My latest *Listener* dated January 23, 1953 contains a number of varied subjects on its correspondence page. They comprise Thoughts on St. Andrew's Day, a comment on Vaughan Williams' work, three letters replying to a facetious comment in an earlier issue, request for information on Pelorus Jack, complaints about children's swearing and a discussion on whether bats exist



in New Zealand. The emphasis on broadcasting topics was rather slight.

The position could also be improved on the advertising side. The *N.Z. Free Lance* and *Women's Weekly* carry 51% and 43% advertising content compared with the *Listener's* 32% and enquiries indicate that many advertisers refrain from using the broadcasting journal on the grounds that it is bought more for its programme listings than its articles which have a limited appeal. A journal with all the advantages enjoyed by the *Listener* should be in a position to earn substantial profits for it has one of the largest circulations in New Zealand. The solution may lie in a return to its original aim to "assist and supplement the essential work of radio. . . ." for by meeting these requirements it will at the same time be forced to seek a broader basis for public support and assist revenue at the same time.

### *The People's Orchestra*

The *Otago Daily Times* (October 12, 1950) stated:

"It may be argued that the N.Z.B.S. has cultural functions which could not be assessed in terms of financial profit and loss, but it is reasonable to insist that the value of these functions should not be taken too much for granted and that a stage has been reached when there should be a fundamental re-examination of policy . . ."

The point I wish to make is brief—can the N.Z.B.S. continue to finance the National Orchestra without endangering its own financial structure? The last balance sheet for 1952 shows net expenditure on the National Orchestra and Concerts Section at £66,939, and this does not include general departmental overhead or the cost of free advertising on the commercial stations. The National Orchestra is a luxury that the service can ill afford to sustain *unaided*. The orchestra is almost the difference between solvency and insolvency and will have to be viewed in that light sooner or later.

Nothing in this chapter should be taken as criticism of the National Orchestra, which serves a very necessary purpose in the cultural life of the community, but this responsibility should not be borne by the broadcasting service alone.

The Minister justifies the orchestra as a fine institution that should not be sacrificed because it cannot pay its way. No one would disagree with that statement, but why should the listeners



have to finance "a fine institution"? Are all the listeners really interested in the orchestra anyway? As the *N.Z. Herald* once pointed out:

"It [the National Orchestra] benefits a good deal by being able to transmit its music, but the greater gain accrues to those members of the public who attend the concerts in person. It is no discredit to the orchestra to say that on the air its performances are broadly similar to those which famous European and American orchestras have recorded and which the National Stations have been reproducing for years past. Only the applause enables the uninformed listeners to say whether the symphonies and other works he hears are from records or relays from a New Zealand concert hall."

The point is well made and I think would be endorsed by many listeners who resent having to pay a premium towards improving New Zealand's tastes in serious music.

I know there is another side to be considered. For instance, the *Listener* has stated, "A young nation with a symphony orchestra is learning to be civilised" and suggests by inference that the need to point to these civilising values "is a symptom of immaturity". High words, but not a solution to a very real problem in broadcasting finances.

I headed this section "The People's Orchestra" because from the title I hope later in the book to state a case for some authority other than the N.Z.B.S. being saddled with the enormous sums that are necessary to maintain the National Orchestra.

### *The Commercial Network*

I suggest the amalgamation of the National and Commercial Broadcasting Service under the present control has failed the listeners, advertisers, and staff. It has robbed the Commercial Division of identity and initiative, and has placed the administration in the hands of those who previously were in opposition to its aims and aspirations, resulting in the subjugation of the ZB stations for the enrichment of the national stations. Under amalgamation the National Service remains the senior partner, the tendency being to regard commercial broadcasting as a necessary evil, something to be used to advantage and not encouraged unduly. The truth of the matter is that the National Division has developed into a sprawling structure with additions



and alterations added piecemeal, with no regard for overall planning. As a result the division cannot live within its income and depends on the Commercial Division for financial assistance, although this is given the minimum of publicity. An analysis of balance sheets indicates that steps are taken to reduce commercial expenditure to make the maximum profits, which instead of going back to improve the service are being used to offset the deficits of the National Division. Listeners are generally unaware of the implications arising from such a policy and there is certainly no indication as to the actual contribution the Commercial Service is making towards the upkeep of the National Division. Why should not some of the profits from commercial broadcasting be spent by the Commercial Service in providing better programmes for its listeners as was the policy in pre-amalgamation times? Since the amalgamation commercial stations have decreased in popularity, are criticised for over-commercialising, the sameness of their programmes, the lack of variety and highlights, absence of personalities, and the fact that they are no longer "of the people". The organising of concerts in aid of charity, and outside social activities have practically ceased and the placing of the commercials under the National Director has resulted in a complete monopoly of the microphone which has reacted against the interests of the listeners.

I advocate a return to what I term "The New Zealand System of Broadcasting" whereby we had two networks each serving listeners in different capacities, separately administered and providing that degree of competition so necessary in the field of entertainment. The listeners would benefit.

If it is important it would still be possible to retain ministerial control, but separate the two networks, give the Commercial Division autonomy under a commercial manager, with the ZB stations continuing to render financial assistance to the National Division as at present. Under such an arrangement a spirit of competition would be restored, with the Minister responsible for the destinies of *two* broadcasting services.

### *A Matter of Money*

For some years, particularly during the war period, the N.Z.B.S. led a somewhat secluded life of orderly inactivity, transferring to its development and replacement reserves surpluses larger than the annual expenditure on programmes but, alas, that belongs to yesterday.



In 1947-48 the yearly surplus dropped to £127,000 and in 1948-49 the figure fell to £29,583. The *Christchurch Press* (September 22, 1949) commented:

"The programme of expansion as the service acknowledges is far from complete; but it has probably gone far enough to give listeners some idea of the future permanent shape of broadcasting finance. It is not an encouraging prospect. Revenue, of which the bulk comes from licence fees, has increased by about £51,000 in four years, expenditure has increased by £225,000. . . ."

It was obvious that the N.Z.B.S. was heading for financial difficulties but there was no suggestion in the Annual Report that an apparently profitable department would within a year show a deficit, yet the year 1949-50 showed that the National Division finished with a loss of £58,265 which increased to £71,288 in 1952.

It has been obvious for some time that the N.Z.B.S. could not stand the increased costs of the National Orchestra and the increased charges on the growing number of stations being erected, yet until 1950 no hint was given of the approaching storm. An editorial comment from the *Otago Daily Times* (October 12, 1950) made these points:

"It should not be a very difficult problem to check the drift. The loss is actually incurred in the national division of the service and the commercial division continues to return a surplus. The annual income can be estimated within a reasonable margin of error, so the matter becomes one of budgeting accordingly. Capital works must be financed from capital and not from current revenue as was formerly done, and the development programme which is still being carried out must be revised if necessary in the light of the generally changing position. . . ."

A *Christchurch Star-Sun* editorial (October 8, 1951) after commenting on the growing multiplicity of stations added:

"No thought seems to be taken in the planning of operations to the wisdom of cutting the coat according to the cloth. . . . The time appears to be overdue for the application to the service of sufficient business principles to ensure that in this operation due regard is paid to its limited financial resources."



Press reports indicate that in March 1952 Minister Algie was concerned at the drift in the finances of the National Division and was preparing a report for Cabinet, and there is no doubt that a good case could be made for increasing the charge but there are other solutions to be considered. Is it sound economics that when a loss is made in a monopoly business the remedy should lie in making the consumer pay more? This point is emphasised in the *Dominion* editorial (March 7, 1952):

"... The public will not accept higher fees as inevitable, however small the increase, with good grace unless the Government can present a convincing case that it has scrutinised every possible method of saving to offset the deficit or a substantial part of it. Higher charges to the listener should be the last thought in the Government's mind, not the first."

No evidence is forthcoming to indicate that the Government has "scrutinised" every possible method of saving, or increasing revenue; and the annual balance sheet presented to Parliament certainly does not permit the public to ascertain whether any degree of economy could be effected.

Actually the balance sheet is a surprising document, not so much for what it discloses, but what it fails to disclose and a more detailed analysis will be included in the final chapter.

These are some of the problems facing the New Zealand Broadcasting Service to-day but before we can suggest remedies it is well that we examine the evidence which leads to the present position. We should know something of the story of broadcasting in this country and we must start at the beginning.

*In the Beginning*

MY FIRST serious introduction to the microphone was in 1932, when the medium was seven years old, for broadcasting in New Zealand was not officially recognised until 1925—although as far back as 1914 Canterbury University College experimented with what was to become known as “broadcasting”. These initial experiments dealt with receiving signals. It was not long before the students desired to transmit, and this mark of progress found a somewhat cautious approach on the part of the Government towards this new art—an attitude that was to become very familiar in the future. It is interesting to note that in those days an enthusiast wishing to own a receiving set had to pass a test in morse, sign a declaration before a J.P. and supply a certificate of character.

The licensing authority was the Postmaster-General, to whom the Canterbury University College applied for permission to transmit signals. The Hon. J. G. Coates replied (December 7, 1921) that the Government did not consider it desirable to license amateur transmitting stations—and it was not until some time later that a temporary licence was granted.

Otago University College was also in the field, this group having a claim to be the father of New Zealand broadcasting, for Dr. Jack of Dunedin was the first man to broadcast music in this country. The *Otago Daily Times* (August 23, 1921) reported Dr. Jack as prophesying that radio stations would one day be equipped with radio speakers so that people could hear a radio concert in the same way they would attend a theatre. These first attempts at broadcasting were actually taking place in Dunedin, New Zealand, twelve months before the B.B.C. commenced transmissions. By 1922, six stations were broadcasting, the forerunners of a chain of privately-owned B stations that later played a large part in the development of coverage.

Broadcasting received its first big boost with the general election of 1922, when stations broadcast results from their particular area, the press reporting that a broadcast from Auckland was “heard at Hamilton and Gisborne”.



The new medium was on its way.

A perusal of Hansard and the newspaper files from 1922 onwards indicates that Parliament was now taking a lively interest in broadcasting affairs. In August 1922 Mr. D. G. Sullivan questioned the Postmaster-General regarding the Government's intention to operate a national radio service. Mr. Coates replied that the Government preferred to follow whatever policy was decided upon in Great Britain, later stating that the Government had no intention of operating a broadcasting service, but every encouragement would be given private enterprise under Government supervision.

The first regulations were gazetted in 1923—and prospective broadcasters had to satisfy the Government as to character, and undertake to give priority to religious programmes for a period of three hours each Sunday. Broadcasts were restricted to matters of "an educative or entertainment character such as news, lectures, useful information, religious services, musical or elocutionary entertainment and other items of general interest that might be approved by the Minister from time to time".

The timidity associated with the control of New Zealand broadcasting was certainly exemplified in these first regulations, for nowhere else in the English speaking world was broadcasting so rigidly controlled. These restrictive regulations were carefully nurtured by successive Governments, and resulted in the political activity associated with the 1935 election campaign when radio became one of the main issues.

Until 1925 there was no central broadcasting organisation; each station operated independently, did not receive any State grant, and was not permitted any means of raising revenue. The listener paid the Government a licence fee of 5/- per annum and took a chance on the radio entertainment offering. The first broadcast station licensed under these regulations was 1YA Auckland, heard for the first time on April 13, 1923. In reporting a concert, the *New Zealand Herald* stated: "The music was like that of a very fine gramophone, but without the smallest suggestion of the whirring or mechanical sound that so frequently accompanies gramophone music."

Within a year a further eight stations commenced broadcasting, increasing the licensed listeners to 2,000 by the end of 1923. The stations themselves still operated on a shoestring, for at this stage there was little incentive for anyone to invest real capital on improving plant. The Government realised the need for some national service but did not wish to undertake the task.



In 1924 the Act was amended to give the Government power to organise a national service, and the licensee was obliged to "maintain a broadcasting service to the satisfaction of the Minister", while broadcasting was defined as "transmission . . . of approved programmes". However, the Act did give the Minister power to permit advertising, but Government announcements were to be broadcast free of charge. Listeners' licence fees were raised to 30/-, and more than 1,000 failed to renew their licences, obviously deciding to await developments.

In looking back it is apparent that New Zealand was early in the field, but any advantage was dissipated by the unwillingness of the Government to contribute or to permit those contributing any liberty of action.

In 1924 the press related how the Australian Director of Education had broadcast an address from Sydney to school children at Bourke, and a New Zealand Member of Parliament asked the Minister of Education whether broadcasting could not be used for educational purposes in this country. The Minister's reply was somewhat amusing, for he doubted whether material broadcast by people whom the children did not know would prove helpful in removing any sense of isolation. This was a small incident in the story of broadcasting but was indicative of successive Governments' attitude for the next decade. While other countries were taking up this new medium with enthusiasm, New Zealand was lagging behind. These timid politicians wanted New Zealand to mark time and see what the B.B.C. accomplished first. The idea that from an early beginning we might develop a radio system to suit our own requirements was apparently not even considered. The early opportunities were frittered away when an advantage that was likely to accrue from a flying start was lost by the reluctance of the Government.

Broadcasting was drifting, but obviously this temporary period of inactivity would pass, and the next move was awaited with some interest.



### *The Broadcasting Company*

IN 1924 and 1925 the Government was exploring the possibility of organising a national coverage. About this time a wealthy dairyman named William Goodfellow approached the Government with a suggestion that he should provide a broadcasting service for farmers in the Hamilton area. The Government was interested—very interested—and suggested that Goodfellow undertake a national service for the entire country. Apparently this did not appeal to Goodfellow but after considerable negotiation he, in association with a Christchurch business man named A. R. Harris, finally agreed to accept the mandate.

This move was to extricate the Government from a difficult situation and at the same time secure for shareholders some of the profits of an enterprise nurtured and sheltered from the chilly winds of competition. In many respects the Company commenced operations under very favourable conditions for the Government agreed to collect 30/- licence fee from each listener and of this amount the company would receive 25/-. Later the Government advanced £15,000 for capital expenditure which of course made the proposition still more attractive, for the original capital of the company totalled a mere £20,000.

The Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand Ltd. was formed and set about its task with a will. The Auckland station commenced transmissions in 1926, closely followed by Christchurch and Dunedin, while eleven months later the Wellington station completed the chain of the capital cities. Licensed listeners for the same period jumped from 4,430 to 21,000, thus indicating the listeners' confidence in an organised radio coverage. The company operated under Government regulations and was required to give a minimum service of twelve hours per week exclusive of Sunday, with a silent day each week. A further regulation stipulated that gramophone recordings could comprise 25 per cent of programme time for it was hoped to enforce the use of local talent. This latter provision certainly may have assisted local talent by flattering the vanity of the individual performer, but it did little to raise broadcast standards. After



all that mythical person known as the average listener is a human sort of individual who has an unhappy knack of wishing to get a little more than his money's worth, expecting the best possible in the way of radio entertainment. As an individual he was not particularly interested in raising local standards or encouraging inferior artists to practise in his living room—in other words if he wished to hear "Trees" he would prefer the rendition of Donald Novis to the endeavours of some tenor from an adjoining suburb. The budget allocation for programmes was limited, any fees payable to performing artists being meagre to a degree—in fact many were expected to make the initial broadcast without receiving any fee at all. Statements were made that the Company deliberately worked first performance artists as a means of securing programme material without cost, but many artists were scrambling to get at the microphone and were quite happy to broadcast without fee. The Company's attitude was evident in the 1926 report which stated: "The sources for obtaining free talent for programmes are becoming limited and the present standard generally cannot be maintained six nights each week. Already several performers have asked for fees."

Shades of Actors' Equity!

Of course the Company received its share of criticism, which followed lines familiar even to-day—the highbrow thought there was too much rubbish on the air and the lowbrow thought too great a time was devoted to classical music.

The Post and Telegraph Department was given the responsibility of policing the broadcast regulations, the 1929 report to Parliament stating an intention "to insist as far as possible, that the programmes broadcast shall be of a high standard, not only in music and artistic items but also in the lectures and educational talks".

All very wholesome but it did not mean a great deal. It was like asking a church congregation to oppose sin—everyone is in favour but no one takes any positive action. The department is still one of the most efficient of the Civil Service but the suggestion that its officers should be responsible for programme standards would find little favour to-day, yet the local radio inspector was to possess that power for many years.

The Company, endeavouring to keep "on side" with its customers, set up public committees to work with each station, and also appointed honorary official listeners in various areas. These contacts did render some service, but the passing of each year, with an increasing improvement in radio technique, saw their



gradual disappearance from radio management. I doubt whether the committees ever contributed a great deal to broadcasting. In later years we were to be told that the Broadcasting Service remained aloof from its listeners and that musical societies should set up committees for the purpose of "advising" the service. Fortunately these suggestions were not heeded.

The Company staff was very keen to make a success of this new venture and many innovations were introduced. The Agricultural Department used the microphone to keep farmers posted with information including a daily weather report introduced in 1928, while in the following year this was extended to include special forecasts for seasonal activity. The obsolete ban on controversial matter reduced the effectiveness of many broadcasts, nevertheless a number of very interesting talks were broadcast.

Experimental school broadcasts were conducted by 2YA in 1927, but apparently the Education Department was not very impressed, for three and a half years were to pass before anything tangible was accomplished in this field.

When it came to outside broadcasts and re-broadcasts from overseas the Company achieved some notable successes: public functions, Ranfury Shield matches, first Tasman crossing of the *Southern Cross* in 1928, the Murchison earthquake 1929, and the Napier earthquake 1931 were some of the highlights.

Relays and overseas re-broadcasts quickly became part of New Zealand broadcasting but when attempts were made to relay from the sports ground and concert platform troubles developed.

The company desired to feature sporting commentaries as part of the regular programme schedule, and arrangements were made for actual broadcasts from racing and trotting meetings. However the Racing and Trotting Conference decided it was against public interest for such commentaries to be broadcast, on the ground that encouragement would be given to illegal betting. Undoubtedly the broadcasting of race meetings does assist the illegal punter, but in 1928 this reason was not accepted and a wrangle followed. The Racing and Trotting Conference banned course broadcasts, but recommended that clubs give the Company the same privileges accorded the press "as may enable the broadcasting of race results to be part of the evening's programme". The significance of the last phrase was not realised immediately, but when the announcers wished to use the same telephone facilities accorded press reporters they were refused. Conference then admitted their desire to prohibit broadcasting



of results except in the evening sessions. This meant that race results would be available in the press before the Company could broadcast them from any radio station. It was suggested that the Conference was protecting the interests of the press against a well-organised competitor, for it will be remembered that the daily press of those days brought out special late afternoon editions which carried stop press racing results. The Company protested that newspapers were permitted to publish results as soon as they were available and radio was being unduly penalised. There was an outcry at the prohibition, and public opinion applauded when the Company served notice that it intended to secure and broadcast the results. Statements were read over the air claiming that racing results were public property and would be broadcast as such during the afternoon. A temporary relay point was set up outside one course, and this announcement preceded the broadcast:

“As is well-known to the public, the racing and trotting authorities offered the Broadcasting Company free admission to the course, a privilege which is always enjoyed by the newspapers, but the stipulation was made in our case that we should not broadcast any results during the afternoon. The racing authorities, therefore, in addition to prohibiting broadcasting from the course, attempted further to restrict our service until the evening news session. As we could not agree to such a proposition, and cannot broadcast from the course, the Company made other arrangements for securing the results of the races. These results are public property, and the information necessary for broadcasting will be secured by the Company in a perfectly legitimate manner. Listeners will, of course, realise that the Company's officers will be working under difficulties. However, every effort will be made to secure information which listeners desire to know.”

During the broadcast of eight races from an Auckland meeting the announcer, working on the street adjoining the race course, obtained his view of the ground by using step ladders, motor lorries and a Chinese vegetable cart, but he had to shift his relay gear three times to comply with traffic regulations.

The Christchurch *Press* criticised the Company for flouting the wishes of the Conference but the Company replied that the press published news without asking the consent of the parties



concerned, and they were following the same ethical standards in providing information for the public.

Attempts were made in Parliament to persuade the Government to intervene, but the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. J. G. Coates, stated it was a matter for the two parties concerned. The sporting public and listeners' clubs exerted pressure to secure the lifting of the ban but without success. Conference was adamant, and the reasons supporting the ban were many and varied. Mr. J. G. Duncan, Vice-President of the Wellington Racing Club, had this to say:

"It was felt that owing to the almost complete absence of a leisured class in New Zealand, only a small percentage of listeners-in are in a position to spend a day in enjoying the broadcasting of races from the course. Of this section the vast majority could only listen in at the expense of their duties and avocations, thus reducing their productive capacity and causing friction with their employers and economic loss to the country. In fact, I venture to predict that if the broadcasting of racing during the progress of the race becomes a general practice it will not be long before Parliament, in the interests of the community, will step in and put a stop to the broadcasting of all sporting events until after working hours. But apart from these results, any or all of which would be very damaging to racing, the great bulk of listeners-in would be denied the opportunity of hearing the races broadcast. In the interests of the subscribers to the Broadcasting Company themselves, therefore, it will be seen that the decision of the Racing Conference is a wise one."

The *Radio Record* labelled this statement "hypocritical nonsense", adding that if listening to a race broadcast would affect production how much more so would racing itself? The suggestion that Parliament would step in and forbid broadcasting of races on week-days was regarded as ludicrous.

The Company again approached the Racing and Trotting Conference in the following year requesting permission to broadcast race meetings on Saturdays and public holidays, but without success. In the light of some of the original reasons given for not permitting the Company to have facilities on the course, one is pardoned for wondering if the real reason was ever made public. Descriptions continued from outside the course for four years before broadcasts from the course were allowed, and this



permission, never accorded to the Company, was finally secured by the New Zealand Broadcasting Board in August 1932.

In looking back it is hard to realise that any sporting organisations should wish to bar the microphone, for an undertaking that depends on public support for its success usually welcomes publicity. Sporting broadcasts are now accepted as part of the programme service but few people remember that it was not always so. For instance, the New Zealand Rugby Union opposed broadcasts from their grounds and only after pressure would they agree to descriptions of games played by the British touring team in 1930 provided the Company made a donation towards equipping hospitals with receiving sets. The condition was refused on principle but after a conference the N.Z.R.U. finally permitted the broadcasts.

Other organisations were apprehensive regarding the intrusion of the microphone and feared declining public support if people took too kindly to broadcasts from the church, theatre or field. We know now that these fears were groundless and that the microphone, far from bringing any decline, has injected new life in many spheres. The Company wished to provide the maximum service but this enthusiasm was to bring many problems.

In certain religious circles, for instance, opposition was voiced to the broadcast of church services on the grounds that they would keep people away from church, revenues would diminish, and the church itself decline in prestige. These clerics and laymen overlooked one point . . . in church, preachers addressed the already converted, whereas radio enabled them to reach the masses outside.

The Auckland City Council provided a further example of inability to appreciate the new medium. Popular appeal in those days rated brass bands high on the entertainment ladder, so the Company secured permission from the Auckland City Council to feature regular broadcasts by the Auckland Municipal Band. Later the Company paid £300 per annum for this privilege, but in 1928 the Council wished to increase the fee to £750 per annum. This amount was considered excessive, so after fruitless negotiations the broadcasts were cancelled. Looking back the incident appears trivial, but it showed the attitude of a body of responsible citizens to this new medium. Undoubtedly the Council considered that the broadcasting of concerts would result in financial loss due to a reduced attendance, therefore they did not consider it part of their duty to make the services of the band available to the greatest number of people on the basis



of community service. Thus for a number of years, the Auckland Municipal Band, maintained by the ratepayers, was precluded from reaching an immeasurably greater audience.

The inclusion of gramophone recordings in our radio programmes involved the Company in a further problem—that of copyright. Even to-day people do not realise that the purchase of a gramophone record still limits the use that can be made of the disc, in that if a person invites neighbours to listen to a recital on his gramophone, he is according to the law giving a public performance for which he could be called upon to pay copyright fees. Broadcasting was certainly entertaining a very large audience with gramophone recordings at a small cost of three or four shillings per disc, but the thought of copyright payments did not arise until the Australasian Performing Rights Association suddenly claimed its tribute. Obviously with so large a sum of money involved negotiations were carried on at ministerial level. The Government, quite unprepared for these claims, was caught between two fires, for when the nature of the copyright claim was explained it was realised that composer and artist were entitled to payment for the use of their property, but if such payment was excessive, the New Zealand public might be deprived of its radio entertainment. The Postmaster-General in his 1927 Annual Report stated:

“There is no desire to abrogate the sacred rights of property but it is necessary to guard against the new utility of broadcasting being made the target of unreasonable demands by bodies or associations purporting to control copyright. . . .”

The last four words of that statement are significant for when the Company and the A.P.R.A. finally came to terms an agreement—but not a contract—was signed. The agreement called upon the Company to make payments at a fixed royalty rate for material broadcast, but the payments were to be made “without prejudice”. This applies to-day.

Within the first year of operation it was obvious that the Company was going to have a difficult time. Actually because of Government procrastination they had arrived on the scene too late. The listening public, small in numbers, had been demanding a service, so when the Company finally secured its charter the public expected an end to their troubles. They did not take into account the fact that years would have to elapse before the Company could install all the stations necessary to



provide a national coverage. Due to lack of financial resources the Company could only expand by degrees and the coverage provided applied in the main to the cities.

Listeners in New Zealand have always been critical of methods of control, and the Company was particularly vulnerable for as listeners increased enormously in numbers, their complaints increased proportionately. City dwellers were provided with a local service, but the outlying areas had little or no coverage, yet paid the same fees. The Government had stipulated that the power of the stations was to be limited to 500 watts so it was therefore quite impossible for these city stations to give anything like a national coverage, but listeners would not be satisfied with less. Those residing in Hawke's Bay, Poverty Bay, Taranaki, Nelson, West Coast and Southland, who received very little in return for their licence fees, made their protests known to the Government and the Company, but it was the latter who bore the brunt of the attacks. In the case of Taranaki the Company did offer assistance by providing plant and services to the North Taranaki Radio Society which operated 2YB New Plymouth. At the opening ceremony of this station on April 27, 1929 a Company spokesman stated it was their desire to see a truly national service in operation, with relay stations located in the various centres of population, yet linked with the four cities for programme purposes. However in the time that was left to the Company little or nothing was done for these areas, many of them having to rely on the privately owned B stations who, with the exception of 2YB, received no assistance from the Company yet provided a local service that was not forthcoming from any of the main stations. The position of the B stations is dealt with fully in another chapter, so it need only be stated here that they increased in number—until twenty were operating in 1928. Their many supporters throughout the country criticised the Company on the assumption no doubt that they should receive some financial assistance for providing a service in a particular area. Opposition to the Company became vocal and a growing school of thought advocated that so important a public utility should not be in private hands. In 1927 Mr. M. J. Savage (Auckland West) was reported opposing "the private monopoly" of the Company and advocating Government control.

Criticism of the Company increased when listeners in outlying areas found no improvement as the years slipped by. The United Party became the Government in 1929, and there were rumours that the new Government intended to accept responsibility for



a broadcasting service. The first shot in a campaign to oust the Company was fired in Parliament in October of that year by Rev. Clyde Carr (Timaru), who bluntly demanded that the Government should acquire the Company.

In reply the Postmaster-General, Hon. J. B. Donald, said he would not be in a position to indicate Government policy for about two years but it was obvious from this reply that the Government intended taking some steps, and critics redoubled their efforts.

Whenever broadcasting was discussed in Parliament it was usual for the Labour Party to initiate a lively debate urging that the State should provide the service to listeners. Such a discussion took place on October 3, 1930, when the Postmaster-General informed Mr. M. J. Savage that the Government did not intend to renew the agreement with the Company, which expired on December 31, 1931. Then two days later it was announced that as from January 1, 1932 the control and operation of a National Broadcasting Service would be vested in the State. The Government proposed:

- (1) To increase the power of the Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin stations from 500 to 1500-2000 watts, and carry out extensive improvements.
- (2) To install minor stations at Whangarei, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Gisborne, Napier-Hastings, Timaru, and Invercargill, and one on the West Coast of the South Island. These would be of 500 watt power, and would be more or less relay stations but they would also broadcast local programmes.
- (3) To place the Post and Telegraph Department in charge of the technical side.

These proposals indicated an attempt at a national coverage which was something beyond the financial resources of the Company to provide except over a fairly lengthy period. The B stations and their supporters were jubilant, for the Minister had cautiously promised they would not be abolished, that there was room for them to work in conjunction with the national stations. He also stated that he did not think the A.P.R.A. would make any copyright claims on them. This was cheering news as it indicated that the B stations would still be necessary in certain areas and that a place existed for them in the new plans.



When this change in Government policy was examined, however, it appeared that there were plenty of gaps, which were accentuated when the Minister admitted that the Government had no plans for the programme operation of the proposed network, and requested members of the public to submit suggestions. This was a surprising admission, indicating that the Government had rushed into the matter without considering the problems, or before they had prepared any plans at all.

Misunderstanding of the Government's intentions did not help matters, many people actually thinking the Post and Telegraph Department would select the programmes, while others thought they would be supplied by private music firms.

The press reacted unfavourably by claiming the proposals would be a drain on the public purse, as licence fees alone would not enable the service to be self-supporting. This editorial from the *New Zealand Herald* was typical of newspaper comment:

"The scheme is either grossly extravagant or too pretentious to be realised, and therefore represents promises that cannot be fulfilled. Mr. Donald (Postmaster-General) admits that the provision of programmes has still to be arranged, but professes to be confident that, with suggestions from members of Parliament and others, this will be a simple matter. In other words, the Government has decided to plunge into an experiment involving an unknown expenditure, without even adequate appreciation of the complex and harassing difficulty of arranging hundreds of programmes annually, to suit a catholic variety of tastes in a vast audience of extremely sensitive critics. If the Broadcasting Company had relinquished its licence in despair, there might have been some excuse for the Government calling on its technicians to keep the service going, but its action in deliberately assuming the responsibility is incomprehensible. There has never been a more foolish example of State interference in a field positively marked for private enterprise nor one that will be more vehemently condemned by the general public."

The Postmaster-General then stated the scheme was in the melting pot and this made the position still more obscure. However it must be said that the interested parties had plenty of time to formulate proposals, for during the next ten months no further announcements were made by the Government. Business organisations and chambers of commerce were opposed to the



Government's interference with private enterprise, but the public generally accepted the idea of State control, provided safeguards existed against the possibility of political control, and that the listeners would receive a better service.

The Radio Dealers' Association advocated this scheme:

- (1) Public ownership and monopoly.
- (2) Direction by Corporation entirely removed from political control.
- (3) All property to be vested in the Corporation, and all surplus to be used for betterment of the service.

These proposals did not receive a great deal of publicity, but interest was further maintained when the Company released the text of proposals made to the Government in March 1929. The Company had proposed that over a period of five years it would provide a chain of relay stations throughout the country, generally expand coverage, and that a new Company would be formed to carry out the plan, with equal shareholding between listeners and the Radio Broadcasting Company. Control was to be vested in a directorate of eight, four from each party, but the Chairman of the Radio Broadcasting Company to retain his position with the new Board.

The Government did not welcome the release of the plan which had previously been rejected, and relations with the Company became strained. The Directors were desperately anxious to retain the charter and the release of these proposals was an attempt to carry their case to the public over the heads of Cabinet. It was a challenge that was taken up by the press as something preferable to State control. The fact that no alternative plan of operation was forthcoming from the Government added fuel to the controversy, and many months of apparent Government inactivity were to pass before any notice was given of impending legislation. Finally on August 28, 1931 a statement was released.

The Government announced acceptance of a report by a Cabinet sub-committee, who recommended that the B.B.C. form of control should be instituted. A Bill would be submitted to Parliament recommending that as from January 1, 1932 an independent Board would control the Broadcasting Service and the Post and Telegraph Department would continue collecting licence fees and allocating wave lengths.



Shortly after this announcement was made, New Zealand became caught up in the toils of the world depression and a political crisis resulted in the United and Reform Parties merging and forming a Coalition Government under the leadership of the Rt. Hon. G. W. Forbes. The Hon. Adam Hamilton had taken over the Postmaster-General portfolio and the legislation was in his hands. He claimed that as the choice was between private or public control the Government had decided to "follow the B.B.C."

The Labour opposition was critical but did not oppose the Bill as it did meet some of their objections to Company control, but in looking back it is interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. M. J. Savage, strongly advocated that parliamentary debates should be broadcast and hoped the new Board would give favourable consideration to the proposal.

The former Postmaster-General (Mr. J. B. Donald) in outlining the reasons which permitted him to recommend the original proposals to the Government said:

"Broadcasting is a public utility, and on that score . . . it should be a monopoly of the people. It is created by the people, and therefore belongs to the people. . . . All profits made out of broadcasting ought to be returned to the public, either by way of increased value in the programmes or by reduced fees. . . ."

The proposals were subject to slight modification before the Bill was finally passed on November 11, 1931. The Board was to comprise three members appointed by the Governor-General, with an Advisory Council of eight members, five representing the North Island and three from the South Island, all to be appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Postmaster-General, and each member of the Board and Council to serve for a specified term and be eligible for re-election.

Although the Company had plenty of time to absorb the Government's intentions the final decision came as a shock, for some considered that the changing political fortunes of the Reform and United Parties would strengthen the case for the *status quo*.

The long delay between the announcement of Government policy and any definite action had a very adverse effect on the Broadcasting Service as operated by the Company, for certainly



no business men would embark on any capital expenditure or spend money on improvements when they knew their days were numbered. As a result broadcasting merely marked time and conserved its assets. This long period of inactivity drew added protests from listeners in the outlying areas, and it appeared that the incoming Broadcasting Board would be made aware of its responsibilities in no uncertain manner.

*The Company in Retrospect*

IN CONSIDERING the record of the Company it should be remembered that prior to 1925 programmes were provided by a few progressive radio dealers who hoped to popularise the sale of sets, and independent amateurs operating low powered B stations. These people were alive to the possibilities of broadcasting and were convinced that this new art would develop into a powerful social force provided adequate finance was available for the necessary development. The demand was created, and the public looked to the Company to provide a national service immediately.

The Company was under-capitalised. It succeeded in providing a coverage for the main cities, but accomplished little throughout its short career to consolidate its position with the many thousands of listeners who lived outside the four main areas of population. Failure to provide for these people was the rock on which the Company foundered for they wished to proceed slowly, with no intention of sinking large sums of capital in any quick attempt at a national coverage. From a coverage point of view the Government's insistence on 500 watts power for the city stations (with the exception of Wellington) was a mistake that further handicapped the Company in its coverage requirements, the power being more than sufficient for a local service and inadequate for a blanket coverage.

Had the Company sought the assistance of some strategically situated B stations the story might have been different, for reasonable financial outlay on these stations would have given programmes to an additional section of the community and at least stalled criticism for a time. Instead the Company acted as though they were unaware of the existence of these stations, alienating the sympathies of thousands of people who derived their entertainment from them. Concern for the city listeners resulted in public support for the B stations to the detriment of Company interests, and there was ground for the complaints, for after all the Company came into existence to provide a national coverage, and the licence fee was not credited according to the service received.



It is necessary then in assessing the results achieved by the Company to think in terms of a city service. Each year saw an improvement in programmes and an increase in hours of transmission and station power. As far back as 1927 the Wellington station 2YA was the most powerful broadcasting unit in the southern hemisphere. Technically the Company's administration was a triumph, and they laid a firm foundation on which the Broadcasting Board could build. "Silent nights" disappeared and events of local, national and international importance were included in the programmes. In some fields, notably sporting relays and overseas broadcasts, the Company achieved considerable success due to a vigorous policy enthusiastically carried out by its staff. On the programme side it had a number of problems, for the Government regulation restricting the use of recorded music was a severe handicap. The number of artists who were really up to broadcast standard was few indeed, but of course there was no shortage of amateur talent ready and eager to practise on the unfortunate listeners. Maybe we had simple tastes in those days for by present standards the listeners took an awful beating from some of these artists. After the novelty of broadcasting had passed and the stunt relays and broadcasts had been accepted as normal programming, the main criticism of listeners was directed at the studio broadcasts. The Government's intention was no doubt for the best but it is the old story of listeners desiring first-class entertainment and not being particularly interested as to how this high standard is achieved. We are not a race of bards and strolling players so will always have to rely on recorded programme material from overseas—a lesson that the Broadcasting Board had to learn in due course. The Government stipulation on the limited use that could be made of overseas recordings proved to be a handicap in the Company's attempt to provide suitable programmes.

The Company could claim that its activities had been endorsed by the public, for during this five years of operation the licences increased from 3,000 to 70,000, but it was not a valid argument as there was bound to be an annual increase, and the number of B stations in outlying areas would also have a marked bearing on additional licences.

On the credit side it could be said that the Company had many advantages in financial assistance from the State, a guaranteed steady income, and Government support in many ways.

At the outset it was clear that the Directors had decided to concentrate their efforts on a narrow front in preference to



spreading themselves thinly over the country areas. To accomplish the latter would involve heavy capital expenditure which they were apparently not prepared to undertake until they had secured some of the fruits on the narrow front of city coverage.

Two cardinal errors were made at the beginning: they went into the business of broadcasting with insufficient capital, and made no real attempt to gauge the feeling of resentment on the part of the country areas. In this respect the Company was quite stubborn, for at the end of twelve months they would have experienced no difficulty in increasing capital, and if that was not desirable there is every reason to believe the Government would have advanced additional capital under very favourable terms.

It was possibly a question of objectives. The Company built on a solid foundation on the assumption no doubt that they would remain in business indefinitely and their attitude to the country areas left the thought that time was on their side and they would get round to this vexed question in the future. Unfortunately these listeners were not patient, demanded action, and when they did not secure it, commenced to exert political pressure for the redressing of their wrongs. The Company certainly misjudged the political atmosphere and their public relations left much to be desired for the notice of cancellation of the charter caught them by surprise.

On receiving final notice of the termination of the charter the Company claimed that it had received shabby treatment, and when the Government and the Company could not agree on an equitable price for the assets, the case went to arbitration. The Company claimed £85,812, the Government offered £27,353, and the Arbitrator, Mr. Justice Blair, after a personal examination of the four stations and hearing evidence, fixed the figure at £58,646 6s. 2d. The award caused considerable surprise in political circles, being higher than anticipated. A wag pointed out that the Arbitrator's figure could be reached within £2,000 by adding the valuations together and dividing by two.

The Company reluctantly signed off on December 31, 1931 after having seen broadcasting grow in six years from an expensive hobby practised by a few, to a network of four large stations operating on a regular programme schedule. Broadcasting had arrived, was by now an integral part of community life, and listeners had experienced some of the fruits of an organised service. Private enterprise had pioneered the way and like most pioneers, made many mistakes but accomplished a great



deal. Admittedly the Government's breath was hot on the Company's neck throughout, the regulations preventing them from having an entirely free hand. The Company was encouraged to expand but when it reached a particular phase the Government decided it had served its purpose and the State would take a more personal interest in future broadcasting activity. It is a moot point whether the Government really knew what it was about, but history will show that this was the first step on the path to the nationalisation of broadcasting and the elimination of private enterprise from the field. It is interesting also to note that this step, often advocated by the Labour Party, was actually put into effect by a Conservative Government.

## *The Broadcasting Board*

THROUGHOUT THE negotiations that led to the cancellation of the Company's charter the Government made no secret of the fact that it was influenced by the British method of control exercised by the B.B.C. and in appointing the Broadcasting Board hoped to duplicate this form of control in New Zealand.

In many statements the Postmaster-General had reiterated that broadcasting should be a public utility with a cultural basis, and great care would be exercised in choosing the personnel of the Board—that the men appointed would possess attainments making them eminently suitable for the important posts. The *Radio Record* commented editorially:

“The constitution of the Board is therefore of prime importance. It should not be regarded as a suitable berth for the superannuated civil servant or the aged business man. Radio embodies the new spirit of the age; young, vigorous, and progressively minded men with definite radio attainments are essential. . . .”

The Government appointed as chairman a public accountant (Mr. H. D. Vickery, of Wellington), and the other two members of the Board comprised a grocer and farmer respectively in the persons of G. R. Hutcheson (Auckland), and L. R. C. Macfarlane (Culverden). These gentlemen had no claims to youth and no radio experience or attachments. So little interest did one member take in broadcasting that prior to his appointment he did not even own a radio set but having rectified this omission, he said to the dealer who sold him the set: “I suppose I had better own one of these blessed things.” Another member was an announced parliamentary candidate against the Prime Minister but withdrew after receiving his appointment. It was not surprising that the appointments failed to draw any outward signs of enthusiasm from parliamentarians, the press, or listener organisations.

A perusal of the Broadcasting Act, 1931, indicated that the Board's commission was to “develop and improve the service



from time to time", but this was sufficiently vague to give members a free hand. It was obvious that something would have to be done to extend the coverage to those areas still not receiving an adequate service, so one of the first acts of the Board was to appoint a coverage commission consisting of Mr. A. Gibbs, Chief Telegraph Engineer of the Post and Telegraph Department, and Dr. M. A. F. Barnett of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. The commission was to investigate reception and evolve methods for a more efficient coverage, the main points of reference being:

1. Adequacy of the power of existing stations.
2. Practicability of one or more super powered national stations.
3. Desirability of relay stations for provincial areas.

The Board's engineers and the majority of listeners already knew that the answer to these questions must be in the affirmative, for the Company had planned to develop along these lines. It appeared the newly elected Board wished to have its information first hand, for the commission visited some eighty towns where they were welcomed by radio clubs and societies all anxious to provide data.

The report of the commission was a lengthy document which was hailed by the Board as a very valuable contribution. The leader writer of the *Radio Record* in his exuberance went further and claimed: "... the report is the most complete and informative ever prepared upon any radio problem in the world. ..." Actually, the commission in the main brought down obvious facts but tabulated considerable information of great value. The main recommendations were:

1. 1YA, 2YA, 3YA and 4YA, the respective stations in the four main centres, to be modernised, increased in power and rendered stable in operation.
2. An emergency transmitter to be installed in Wellington.
3. Relay stations in the vicinity of Invercargill, Woodville, East Coast of the North Island and Tirau.
4. Special provision for assistance towards improved service at Cromwell, Timaru, West Coast of South Island, Nelson, Taranaki, Ohakune, Opotiki and Whangarei.



The Board adopted the plan but indicated it would be subject to financial considerations. Plans went ahead immediately for the modernisation and increased powering of 1YA, 3YA and 4YA, hours of transmission were increased, and tests taken to secure more efficient transmitter sites. An attempt was made to improve the service to regional areas, monthly subsidies being paid to eight B stations at Hamilton, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Masterton, Gisborne, Napier, Greymouth and Invercargill. Finally the Board announced that outside advice was being sought regarding the transmitting plant at 2YA—again not very flattering to its own engineers.

In the second year of office (1933) the Board opened the new 3YA with a power of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kilowatts, as with future stations placing the transmitter outside the city to improve total coverage. A new emergency transmitter followed in Wellington, operating for four hours daily under the call sign of 2YC and in 1934 the new 1YA commenced operations on a power of 10 kilowatts—the most powerful station in the country. The following year 3YA was increased to this power and by the end of the year a 10-kilowatt 4YA completed the chain of the four major cities.

This was a period of considerable activity. In 1933, for instance, there were thirty-nine broadcasting stations originating programmes, thirty-one being privately operated B stations and the remaining eight located in the four main centres, operated by the Broadcasting Board. Frequently congestion made it difficult for the older type of receiving sets to obtain a clear signal, so the Post Office introduced a new schedule of frequency allocations, giving the best positions to the national stations and preference to the subsidised B stations. The remaining B stations were regarded as providing a local service to their respective districts, and secured the remaining frequencies but in a less favourable position on the dial. This re-allocation of frequencies did improve reception from some stations and was justified, but the change interfered with the listening habits of a number of people, completely blotting out signals from a powerful American station that held many New Zealand listeners during evening hours. Some critics maintained that this was a deliberate attempt to blanket certain popular overseas stations and force people to rely on the national stations. This, of course, was nonsense, for the new allocations were a technical advance.

During the whole period of the Board's regime, its engineers were concerned with the increasing amount of electrical inter-



ference. Greater use was being made of electrical machinery and the unsatisfactory nature of much of this plant and appliances made the lot of many listeners difficult, in some areas the noise level being almost as high as the signal length. Post Office inspectors were continually endeavouring to reduce interference but they had no power to enforce their requests and it was not until the Government took authority under the Post and Telegraph Amendment Act, 1933, that any real improvement was made.

The next problem tackled by the Board was programmes. Many individuals and groups claimed to speak for the public but no one really knew what type of entertainment the listeners required. The Board sought this information in 1932 by issuing a questionnaire to each licensed listener. Approximately 24,000 forms were returned completed, which meant that some 40 per cent of the licensed listeners had voiced their opinions. This return was disappointing but it did give the opinions of a cross-section. For instance, 93 per cent owned valve sets and very few now used the old crystal sets. The most popular listening time was between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m., and 75 in each 100 listeners preferred recorded programmes from overseas. Band music was the most popular, followed by light orchestral items, humorous songs and monologues, comic opera and musical comedy, and instrumental items in that order. Long plays were least preferred.

The actual questionnaire is of historical interest for it was the first and only occasion on which our broadcasting service has made any attempt to undertake listener research, although this is an important part of broadcasting in most countries. It is interesting to examine the questionnaire in detail.

Question 1. Do you prefer entertainments provided by local artists or recordings?

Result: Local artists 25.89%; Recordings 74.11%.

This preference did not occasion any surprise, for the Board's method of handling local talent left much to be desired. The Board engaged platform personalities whose appeal was limited to that section of the community commonly labelled "high-brow", a tendency which created an antipathy to live artists that exists to some extent to-day. There is, of course, a definite place in radio schedules for amateur talent but it must reach broadcasting standards and should not be permitted to practise on listeners.

Question 2. To which New Zealand station do you listen most frequently?

Result:	1YA	16.06%
	2YA	57.96%
	3YA	9.92%
	4YA	5.35%
	Other	10.71%

It was to be expected that 2YA would be placed at the head of the bill for it was the most powerful station in New Zealand, operating for a longer period than the others. The result of this portion of the questionnaire was used by the Board to question the claims of the B stations to popularity, but this was unfair, for listeners were not invited to express their opinion of the B stations—the remarks were confined to the national stations only.

Question 3. If the general broadcasting hours were 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. at what time would your set normally be in use?

1st	8 p.m. to 9 p.m.
2nd	9 p.m. to 10 p.m.
3rd	6 p.m. to 7 p.m.
4th	7 p.m. to 8 p.m.
5th	noon to 1 p.m.
6th	10 p.m. to 11 p.m.
7th	3 p.m. to 4 p.m.
8th	5 p.m. to 6 p.m.
9th	4 p.m. to 5 p.m.
10th	1 p.m. to 2 p.m.
11th	2 p.m. to 3 p.m.
12th	10 a.m. to 11 a.m.
13th	11 a.m. to noon

The order of preference shows the gradual transformation of the radio in its role as a home entertainer. In 1932 the radio was in use only when the family could collectively listen and this is borne out by the fact that 8 p.m.-9 p.m. was shown to be the peak listening period while the morning and afternoon sessions were least desired.

To-day the radio is an integral part of home life and remains switched on for long periods, supplying entertainment or maybe background for a busy housewife.



Question 4. Indicate the order of preference for the following sessions:

Result:	1st	Evening concert session
	2nd	Dinner session
	3rd	Description of sporting events
	4th	Dance session
	5th	News and market reports
	6th	Children's sessions
	7th	Religious services

The placing of religious services in last position occasioned little or no surprise for the method of presenting church broadcasts could hardly be regarded as stimulating.

The standard of the children's services could not be rated very highly for the authorities had failed to perceive that a child is not a small adult but is a different being. Failure to recognise this fact resulted in the low standard of these sessions. A children's programme must be planned on the basis of sound child psychology, which calls for a programme containing action and humour. Children possess uncontrolled imagination which accounts for the popularity of certain features in their sessions and strengthens the opinion held by some that only adults can entertain children. Radio executives are frequently misled by mail which expresses the opinion of the parent and not the particular listeners concerned. This session being the largest single feature at any station should warrant a separate group of specialists equipped to handle such an important phase of broadcasting activity.

Question 5. Indicate the order of your preference for the following classes of entertainment during the evening.

- 1st Band music
- 2nd Light orchestral items
- 3rd Humorous songs and monologues
- 4th Comic opera and musical comedy items (vocal)
- 5th Instrumental solos, duets, trios, quartettes
- 6th Hawaiian music
- 7th Community singing
- 8th Vocal solos, duets, trios, quartettes
- 9th Talks (educative and informative)
- 10th Elocutionary items (light and humorous)

- 11th Short plays and sketches
- 12th Concerts by music societies and choirs
- 13th Talks (sporting and topical)
- 14th Opera
- 15th Classical and chamber music
- 16th Elocutionary items (serious and dramatic)
- 17th Whole evening plays

This return indicates that the listener was seeking entertainment and resented the clumsy attempts made to educate tastes. This does not mean that radio cannot be regarded as an educator, for the contrary is the case—it is merely a question of the method of presentation.

The comments on the questionnaire were so many and so varied that much was made of the fact that 60 per cent of the electorate did not vote, thus laying themselves open to the charge that they were perfectly satisfied with the radio fare provided. The 40 per cent return was satisfactory as a sample showing the public trend.

Under Board control the programmes became more varied and transcriptions were imported to entertain listeners. Programmes were now planned, and the famous "blueprint" came into being. The new system called for the capital city stations to broadcast the same type of programme at the same period each week. Thus, if Monday was classical night from 1YA, then comedy and popular recordings could be heard from 2YA, and listeners would have a choice of programmes. This "blueprint" remained in force at least until 1950, with variations and modifications, but local conditions were permitted to interfere in later years and the programme arrangers were not forced to follow the plans slavishly.

We mentioned in the previous chapter that the advisory committees of listeners gradually lost caste, being finally abolished by the Board in 1932. These committees represented musical and dramatic societies grouped around each national station. In the early days they may have performed some useful work but the passing of each year saw their influence decline with both the station and the public. This can be attributed to the fact that these groups did not keep abreast of public trend in entertainment, devoting too much time to furthering the ends of their particular society.

The Board's intimation caused a stir in musical circles, but



passed unnoticed by the listeners. In the past, the Board had set aside £250 for each centre, to be distributed yearly among the societies which broadcast and the loss of this revenue was a serious one. No one would object to the Board encouraging these societies, but it was up to them to present their material on the air in a manner that could be readily understood and appreciated by listeners. Actually their dismissal enabled the programme organisers to concentrate on their jobs of providing the best in entertainment irrespective of source. On occasions these committees had been somewhat of an embarrassment to the staff, and their demise was welcomed in the programme room.

The Advisory Council was another body that had a short life. We have already seen how certain parliamentarians had misgivings when the Government decided to liquidate the Company and appoint a Board to control the Broadcasting Service. Fears were expressed that bureaucratic control might result in the public having no redress for wrongs, real or imaginary, and this pressure resulted in the Government introducing an amendment setting up an Advisory Council for the purpose of "advising the Board in respect of its functions under the Act". Undoubtedly the Government wished listeners to believe the Council would provide a link between them and the Board, and that an elective Council would give them added protection. This appeared to be very fair on paper and served to placate the feelings of those Government members who, while not wishing to embarrass the Government, desired to keep "on side" with the listeners. The amendment suited them admirably.

The radio clubs did not waste any time in forwarding nominations for the Council, but whether the Government accepted any of these recommendations is not known, for subsequent moves were shrouded in secrecy. The public were merely informed through the columns of the press that the Advisory Council would comprise Messrs. A. B. Chappell (Auckland), J. S. Anchor (Hamilton), E. T. Davis (New Plymouth), W. A. Waters (Palmerston North), J. H. Owen (Wellington), C. R. Russell (Christchurch), H. Booth (Dunedin) and A. W. Jones (Invercargill).

The Council accomplished little and did not play any real part in the control of broadcasting. As one member remarked later "... the Council was nothing but a sop to avoid the fulfilment of the Minister's promise of an elective Board." Actually the Council could not meet unless requested to do so by the Board, and the general manager acted as secretary, suggesting



that the members were apparently dominated by the general manager and the Board.

Representation on the Council was evenly distributed throughout the country and it was thought that special efforts would be directed to a more efficient coverage for regional areas. Listeners in certain areas who had been complaining to the Board of the poor service, now transferred their requests to the Council, but the results were usually disappointing, for on no single occasion did the Council ever act contrary to the wishes of the Board. One angry meeting of listeners in Nelson passed some very strong resolutions concerning the conduct of the Council, but it was the general manager of the Board who took up the cudgels on their behalf. However we must return to the regional areas.

We have noted that the coverage commission recommended improvements in general coverage by detailing certain areas which required assistance. This was partially met by subsidising some of the existing B stations, and it looked as if the regional areas were at last going to receive their due, but then from out of the blue came a resolution from the Advisory Council recommending that no further financial support should be given to the regional stations. Listeners in the remaining areas were very loud in their protests, particularly when it was pointed out that this resolution was not passed until each country member on the Council had secured a subsidised B station in his town—in fact one member actually owned the station that secured a subsidy. Later a member of the Council admitted that the Board requested the Council to nominate the eight stations for assistance and then recommend no further subsidies be paid.

The listeners were powerless, for the method of election to the Council gave no satisfaction either to the public or the radio clubs. When the term of office expired the Postmaster-General merely communicated with the clubs requesting nominations for the next term. The clubs duly forwarded their nominations, but that was the last they heard about them until they read in the press that the sitting members had been re-appointed. There was no poll, no advice on the numbers of nominated, and no indication that the listeners' nominations had been heeded in the slightest degree. Actually the original members appointed by the Minister held office continuously until the Council was abolished with the reconstruction of the Board in 1935. When the Board said "Come" they came. When the the Board said "Go" they went, and when they had served



their purpose and the Government said "Jump" they jumped—into oblivion. The appointment to the Advisory Council had been likened to a political confidence trick served up to listeners who fondly imagined they were securing representation in the control of the Broadcasting Service. The move may have extricated the Minister from a difficult political situation yet maintained the *status quo*. The Minister merely elected two bodies instead of one to do the job, but the Board remained supreme in all fields. This may have been clever political manoeuvring but listeners claimed they had received shabby treatment.

Another important highlight of the Board's regime occurred on the other side of the world on December 19, 1932, when the Empire shortwave station opened at Daventry, England. The B.B.C., alone of the great networks in the English speaking world, had early realised the importance of shortwave broadcasting and experimented from 1927. Three years later at an Imperial Conference the British Government propounded a scheme for an Empire shortwave service, but the Dominions were unwilling to give any financial support, so in the end the B.B.C. accepted full responsibility and even to-day the Dominions make no payment for the shortwave programme and news service from London.

In the experimental period, the Board, Post and Telegraph Department and individual listeners furnished valuable reports on reception, enabling the B.B.C. to select the frequencies and time bands that would give the most efficient service to this country. Although reception was indifferent in the early years, this country did re-broadcast many important programmes. The first major project from this source was the Christmas programme in 1932 when the Empire stations linked for a roll call of greetings which terminated with that historic broadcast by King George V. From that date New Zealand listeners have heard eyewitness accounts of all the important events and have relied on the B.B.C. to provide that necessary link between Great Britain and this country. "This is London calling" has become a familiar phrase in most New Zealand homes and perhaps it is this close association that affected the outlook of our political leaders whenever broadcasting was discussed. Successive Governments and spokesmen for the Board continued parroting the slogan "We are following the B.B.C." This fetish was very popular during the Board era and was partly responsible for the slow progress made in many fields—particularly in the provision of a national coverage. A little reflection on the



part of our broadcasting administrators would have shown that Great Britain and New Zealand had nothing in common in this particular science, for the B.B.C. served an area where the main listening population was grouped in large cities and towns, and they also had a strong native entertainment industry in addition to top European artists. The listeners also had powerful foreign stations located comparatively close to their shores—sufficiently popular indeed to cause the B.B.C. acute embarrassment. These conditions were exactly the opposite to those obtaining in New Zealand, yet an attempt was made to confine our listeners to an imitation framework of the B.B.C.

These lines recall an incident. Mr. Macfarlane of the Broadcasting Board, on his return from a trip to England in 1934, complained that the New Zealand press was prone to criticise the Broadcasting Board, while in England everyone, press included, were proud of their B.B.C. The newspapers were quick to reply to Mr. Macfarlane and as a result the Board's policy received a severe mauling in editorial columns.

Here is a comment from the official organ of the New Zealand Manufacturers' Federation:

"One of the members of the New Zealand Broadcasting Board, a Mr. Macfarlane, has just landed back from a trip to England and tells us of the pride English people take in the radio work of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and how sad it is to return here and find the public so critical and complaining of our broadcasting service. We have never yet been able to ascertain what qualifications either Mr. Macfarlane or his confreres on the Board controlling our radio possess for the job, nor do we know how far our returned tourist is competent to compare the British Broadcasting Corporation's broadcasting with the painful programmes put over the air by his own Board, but there are others besides Mr. Macfarlane who have listened in to both, and he will find it hard to get anyone to agree with his extraordinary views.

"Did Mr. Macfarlane listen in to the recent 'world broadcast' which the Board stations transmitted as a 'message of goodwill' to overseas listeners? If so, how would he say it compares with Daventry or Oswaldtwistle? In our humble opinion it was a painful affair, which must have given foreign listeners an amazing impression of our cultural standard so far as radio goes, and any Sydney B Station would have been ashamed to put it on the air. The speeches of the four Mayors



should have been cut out, and the Minister's speech cut 80 per cent. The Deputy Mayor of Dunedin said—"If any of my listeners should be listening in", while Mr. Adam Hamilton, as responsible Minister for radio told the world that 'some of the lakes in New Zealand are a thousand miles above sea level'. The Maori items must have been unintelligible and mere noises to any overseas listener, but let us hope that (like 99 per cent of our re-broadcasts from Daventry or Chelmsford) 'atmospheric conditions were against favourable reception' of our goodwill programmes to the world."

It was obvious that no one was very happy with the accomplishments of the Board, who had merely added to, instead of removing pressure from, the Government. By 1934 opponents of the existing method of control concentrated on the regulation banning controversial matter from programmes or talks, and the treatment accorded the B stations. These two topics were always likely to arouse spirited protests in parliamentary debates and on many public platforms, driving through narrow party lines much to the embarrassment of the Minister. Undoubtedly changes were contemplated, so it came as no surprise when the Postmaster-General introduced a Broadcasting Amendment Bill on March 6, 1935, but the actual provisions of the Bill did surprise and dismay many people.

The Government had decided to transfer to the Board the control of *all* programmes, including broadcasts from the B stations; the Board would be given power to ban any programme it considered unsuitable, and in the event of the B station refusing to obey such an instruction, the Minister could cancel the licence to operate. Previously, the Post and Telegraph Department had policed the B stations. The Bill also provided for the withdrawal of the regulations banning controversial matter, the Board deciding what could, or could not, be broadcast. The constitution of the Board was also increased from three to seven members, and the Advisory Council was abolished. The prohibition against advertising from the B stations, previously included in regulations, was given statutory authority by being embodied in the Bill, and the licence fee was reduced from 30s. to 25s. as from April 1, 1935.

In introducing the Bill, the Hon. Adam Hamilton, who had retained his original portfolio, emphasised the belief in control by a Board rather than a private company or the State. He accepted the B.B.C. pattern as a goal but pointed out that



whereas the B.B.C. had a clear field we were hampered by the existence of B stations. These stations could expect no support from the Government although in the past they had performed a useful service. The Minister made it clear that they would not be encouraged, nor would they receive any portion of the broadcasting revenue. Further, no new B stations would be licensed, nor would any existing stations be permitted to increase transmission hours or station power. The Minister did say, however, that the Board could subsidise any station it thought fit. The new Board was to be given complete control of broadcasting in New Zealand, but the Post and Telegraph Department would remain the licensing authority and would control wave lengths. The proposal to increase the strength of the Board would give a wider representation to different interests such as literature, music and education, and the Board members would be selected accordingly, thus giving greater democratic control.

The Bill provoked a lively discussion in Parliament, and Labour members objected to the Government farming out its responsibilities to a Board, who, though handling public funds, was not directly answerable to the people. General dissatisfaction was voiced at the manner in which the Board had discharged its duties, mainly on the grounds that the members had outside interests and, therefore, devoted only a small portion of their time to the control of broadcasting. This criticism was especially levelled at the Chairman, H. D. Vickery. Others argued that the B stations gave healthy competition to the national stations and there should be a place for them in the future, particularly as the Board appeared to be concentrating on alternative programmes for the four main centres before many areas even possessed a satisfactory coverage. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Savage, strongly protested against the intention to transfer the control of controversial matter to the Board. It was the firm opinion of the Opposition that the Board should not exist and that the Minister should be responsible for the control of the Broadcasting Service. The Bill gave the Board power that had previously belonged to the Minister, and Mr. Savage promised that if Labour came into power at the next election they would see that the elected representatives of the people, not a Board, controlled the service.

Mr. Hamilton, in reply, assured Parliament that the Board would not be permitted to close down any B station without first referring the matter to him. He did not think there was



anything detrimental to the B stations in the Bill, and in areas where the national stations did not give a service, it would be the duty of the Board to support a B station. The Minister also promised to consider the appointment of listeners' representatives to the Board.

In the committee stages two concessions were made. Two Board members were to be selected from persons nominated by organisations representing listeners and the word "control" was altered to read "supervise" as related to the Board's authority over B stations' programmes.

The Bill was passed by thirty-six votes to nineteen and became law on April 2, 1935.

There was no dearth of applicants for seats on the new Board, one application with considerable backing coming from the National Council of Women, while the Newspaper Proprietors' Association considered that the similarity between publicity in the press and radio entitled them to representation.

The new Board comprised Messrs. W. H. Cocker (Auckland) and H. G. Livingstone (Christchurch) for a term of four years, Dr. S. K. Phillips (Auckland) and J. L. Passmore (Dunedin) for three years, and Messrs. E. Palliser (Wellington) and G. R. Hutcheson (Auckland) for two years. All members of the old Board had been re-appointed with the exception of L. R. C. Macfarlane (Culverden), while the original Chairman, Mr. Vickery, retained the chairmanship.

Of the new members, Dr. Phillips was a Doctor of Music. Mr. Palliser was an estate agent with varied outside interests, Mr. Cocker came from a well-known legal firm and possessed liberal views, while Mr. Livingstone was a well-known business man who organised for the Reform Party then in power. Mr. Passmore was announced as a listeners' representative, but there was no poll, the appointment being made by the Minister.

The reduction of the licence fee was welcomed by listeners, who claimed they were paying the highest fee in the world. Actually the Board's revenue was only reduced by two shillings, for they now received 23s. from each licence instead of 25s. previously. The saving was made by the termination of an agreement between the Government and Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd. in respect of certain patent rights, but the Post Office continued to receive 2s. for the collection of each licence fee.

No one mourned the passing of the Advisory Council. It had

met three times each year and had served no useful purpose whatsoever.

The Postmaster-General said the Board was well balanced and representative of the listeners. However there was an increasing body of opinion which considered Board control unsatisfactory, this applying particularly to those areas poorly served by the national stations. All too frequently when deputations waited on the Postmaster-General they were informed that their representations should be made to the Board, but when they approached that body they were informed the Board could do nothing because Government policy was involved. Towards the end of the Coalition Government's term of office relations between the Minister and the Board became strained. One instance concerned the Minister's visit to Nelson, where, after personal investigation on the spot, he became convinced that the service from national stations did leave much to be desired. On his return to Wellington he asked the Board to attend to the matter, but the Board refused to see the Minister, or accept his recommendation. This state of affairs continued until Labour became the Government after the 1935 election, when they sacked the Board and appointed a Minister to control the service.



*The Board in Retrospect*

OF COURSE it is very easy to be wise after the event, particularly in broadcasting where the failures are remembered and the successes are taken for granted. However, the Broadcasting Board in retrospect provides a very interesting study.

The programme questionnaire was a step forward, and the Board had funds to provide programmes for all tastes. They paid adequate fees to local artists but the results were disappointing. Choirs and musical societies broadcast. For some reason, the Board in the early days paid an identical fee to each society irrespective of broadcast value, but in later years the fee was based on "entertainment value". Overseas artists and companies were encouraged to broadcast and some excellent material was forthcoming from this source. Re-broadcasts and recorded programmes from the B.B.C. continued to feature in New Zealand programmes, but little effort was made to secure recorded programmes from other countries, notably the United States. Throughout, the programme emphasis was on classical lines, popular programming receiving scant consideration. Distinguished visitors from abroad, statesmen, sportsmen, and writers, were welcomed to the microphone, but talks by New Zealanders were usually of very low standard because the subject matter was of interest to a minority. This was largely due of course to the absurd "no controversy" ban which greatly limited the scope of this sphere, and even when the Board possessed freedom of action on controversial matters its policy remained timid and colourless. Service sessions such as weather reports, talks on health, gardening and books, etc., were of a reasonably high standard, a limited news session was broadcast, but unlike many other countries the Board made no attempt to set up its own news service, relying on permission to read from the daily newspapers. Outside broadcasts, relays from sporting events, church services, and children's sessions were improved and extended, and the informative side of broadcasting grew rapidly. The educational authorities were slow to see the possibilities of broadcasting in their field, but nevertheless regular broadcasts to



schools were made. The weakness here was the dearth of suitable speakers and the lack of equipment in the schools. However, the Board did succeed in proving that radio could be of great assistance in the education of the young, and by 1935 a first-class service was operating.

The Board's record was weak on administration and criticism was levelled at the manner in which staff appointments were made. Employment was offered to many employees of the Company, and the Board gained from their experience, but a hush-hush policy was adopted with regard to the more important posts. The Board throughout appeared to lack confidence in its own engineers—constantly calling in outside assistance to advise on problems. They did not wish an announcer to be human or place his personality through the microphone—he was merely a necessary voice to convey certain impressions or information to listeners, but that was all.

At nearly every turn the Board placed themselves "offside" with listeners. When a bold policy was indicated they played safe, for instead of intelligently facing new problems of coverage the issues were invariably side-stepped. For the most part the organisation of talks remained elementary, innocuous, gentle and soothing. The staff throughout the country were keen and eager, but the Board policy crushed their initiative. The announcers were stereotyped and while many regional areas still complained of poor reception, the Board was busy providing a duplicate service for the four main centres. These men lacked vision and flouted public opinion. Like primitive men they feared the unknown and remained on the worn path of orthodoxy. New ideas, an improvement in presentation, a demand for a particular service, a suggestion that more overseas programmes be imported, initiative on the part of the B stations who refused to die, these tended to irritate the administrators. Instead of welcoming innovations the Board appeared to fear them. They wanted to control radio in all forms, but spent over-much time preparing to ward off certain possibilities. Censorship, prohibitions and restrictions were acceptable alike to the Board and the Government, and they became their very tools of trade.

On the other hand, it can be said that the Board did improve coverage, greatly increased the hours of transmission, provided an alternative service to the city areas, and left substantial reserves for future development. The latter could indicate weakness, for all too frequently it was apparent that the Board members possessed little or no knowledge of radio, administering their



stewardship as though it was an estate which had to pay its way and, if possible, show a profit. The husbanding of financial resources became very marked and as radio administrators they proved to be business men whose main interest was to build up large reserves for a rainy day.

That was the listeners' misfortune.

Viewed in retrospect the original Board was a failure. The general manager was the strong man and the three gentlemen who comprised the Board were amateurs when appointed and remained Simon Pure throughout their term of office. They gave no indication of understanding the problems that crowded in on them and like the Company before them remained out of touch with listener requirements. They were arrogant in their ignorance, and insulting in their independence when they could refuse to even see the Postmaster-General. They treated the Advisory Council in very cavalier fashion and these men appeared to revel in their humility. As a result Corporation control that has proved so successful overseas was completely discredited in New Zealand, because the members of the Board lacked courage, initiative and guts. What should be made clear was that the *method of control* did not fail but the *men who were appointed* to control were not big enough. Their failure made the vision of ministerial control appear as a welcome alternative, that would at least be amenable to some form of listener control through Parliament.

*The B Stations*

THE STORY of New Zealand broadcasting would be incomplete without mention of the part played by the B stations, some of whom provided programmes before the Radio Broadcasting Company commenced operations. During the fifteen years of their existence, these small privately owned stations were engaged in a constant struggle for existence and official recognition. Succeeding Governments did not want them, the Radio Broadcasting Company, and later the Broadcasting Board found them an embarrassment, while the press could see in them the spectre of commercial broadcasting.

Some of these stations were operated by radio dealers who helped to popularise radio and thus sell additional receiving sets. Their opponents seized upon this point and claimed that the proprietors were seeking profit for themselves, completely overlooking the fact that each additional set sold would increase the yearly revenue of the Company and Broadcasting Board.

On the other hand those stations not attached to any business, and not having a regular source of income, were regarded as radio vagrants and every effort was made to starve them out.

The lot of the B stations was an unenviable one. They were the illegitimate offspring of successive administrations and no one wished to assume responsibility for their upbringing. The Government continued to license them but would not help them. Most of them were refused any subsidy and denied the right to earn revenue by advertising. The mortality rate was high, those who survived being assisted by individuals and clubs who raised the necessary funds and also provided many broadcast items without charge.

When the Reform Government initiated the first coverage scheme with the Company it was hoped in some quarters that favourable provision would be made for the B stations, but none was forthcoming. Revenue from licence fees was to go exclusively to the Company, thus people who listened to the B stations were forced, by law, to contribute to the Company,



although in certain areas they could only receive an indifferent signal from any of the Company's stations.

The B stations decided to organise. These operators considered there was ample room for them and pointed to Australia where a similar type of station was broadcasting in conjunction with the official service.

The first attempt to organise was in 1928, when the Dunedin stations 4ZL, 4ZM and 4ZO circularised other stations then in existence, suggesting that they form a national organisation and secure a monetary return for their services. The circular suggested this could be granted in one of three ways: (1) A Government grant to cover operating expenses; (2) stations to be permitted six minutes of each hour for advertising; (3) a combination of a grant and reduced advertising time.

Throughout their fifteen years' struggle, these stations in the main favoured independence through commercial broadcasting, and the idea of a Government subsidy or grant from the licence fee was repugnant and to be sought as a last resort.

A copy of this particular circular reached the editor of the *Radio Record*, the result damaging the B stations' case considerably. This journal (December 21, 1928) carried a page heading "Radio to Raid Listeners' Funds"; portion of the article read:

"... we are, therefore, glad to be able to present listeners with information of the movement that is on foot so that they may be aware of where their best interests lie. Briefly, it is proposed that combination should be effected between the owners of the eight B class broadcasting stations now operating in the Dominion with a view to squeezing financial support for their stations from the revenue provided by listeners for the maintenance of the Broadcasting Service in New Zealand."

This article began a lengthy controversy, and many plans were put forward. Mr. L. E. Strachan, Station Manager of 3XC, Christchurch, stated a sound case for the management and control of B stations as an auxiliary service to the Company. Under his scheme the B stations would not receive any grant from the "listener funds" but would earn revenue from controlled advertising. The *Radio Record* in objecting to this scheme stated that two groups of stations would intensify the costliness of the present service by creating competition for artistic talent, and the business firms would outbid the Company. Further comment read:



"Another factor is involved in the question of exploiting the air for advertising purposes, that is, competition with existing mediums such as the daily press. In New Zealand the press is highly organised, very efficiently conducted and renders a very valuable public service. It derives much of its revenue from the sale of advertising space. If the press found radio an active competitor for advertising revenue, its attitude to radio would certainly become less tolerant than it is. Radio benefits greatly by the liberal manner in which the press informs its readers of forthcoming programmes. No sum within the capacity of listeners to pay would compensate for that service. The success of any station selling publicity on the air would be largely determined by its capacity to give a large public prior knowledge of forthcoming programmes. We would not imagine the press would welcome a system which could be successful only at the expense of its own advertising revenue."

The suggestion that our Broadcasting Service should not expand in a particular field for fear of offending the press was novel to say the least.

The circular of 1928 is an historical document because it marks the first attempt made by these stations to fight for a place in broadcasting. In the following year the operators and radio dealers held a conference in Wellington to examine various proposals for assistance to B stations.

A scheme was placed before Postmaster-General Donald of the United Ministry, which sought permission to form a company to operate four B stations capable of providing continuous programmes from early morning until midnight. No subsidy was sought, but the Company wished to use ten per cent of its programme time for advertising. The proposed organisation would be controlled by a board of five, comprising members representing the Government, B stations, radio trade and listeners. It was rumoured at the time that Mr. Donald was interested in the proposition, but the *Radio Record* (February 1, 1929) could see no advantage at all in the scheme, and commented:

"Another very important factor which we have already mentioned is that inroads upon the advertising allocation of the mercantile firms operating in New Zealand would not be welcomed by our newspapers. It might be arguable that money appropriated to radio would be supplementing newspaper



advertising—that such expenditure was only developing goodwill, and that press advertising would always be required to clinch sales. There is something in that argument. It might conceivably be urged that radio advertising would extend the demand for press advertising, and so do the newspapers good. Allowing some weight to this contention, we would not, however, welcome the task of endeavouring to convince the newspapers in this country that the sale of time over the air by the radio company or companies would be a fair return for the hospitality accorded radio programmes by the press in general.”

One could imagine Prime Minister Savage six years later requesting a press blessing on a State-owned Commercial Broadcasting Service.

Opponents of the scheme thought it unwise to set up another radio network in case it weakened the central organisation—that two weaklings would be struggling for the nourishment adequate for one. The Postmaster-General later announced that he “was not disposed to accede to the request”.

Naturally enough the press was opposed to the introduction of commercial broadcasting. Any visitor returning from overseas could always be sure of an interview if he would merely condemn commercial broadcasting. In 1929, J. H. Owen, later to become a member of the Advisory Council, was reported as saying:

“God help New Zealand and broadcasting if the Government ever allows any interference, in any shape or form, from the would-be advertiser or private station. The result will only be a polluted atmosphere such as obtains in Canada, the United States, and to some extent Europe. I do not hesitate to say that.”

The B stations were working against time for it was realised that sooner or later the question of copyright payments would arise. The blow fell in September 1928 when A.P.R.A. served notice that they expected payment for all recorded material broadcast.

The Dunedin stations carried their plight to the public, over a thousand people attending a meeting called to discuss the situation. No one disputed the right of A.P.R.A. to payment but it was difficult to see how any claim could be made unless



the stations could first earn revenue. The obvious answer was sponsored programmes and the meeting resolved to urge this line of action on the Government. Those present also decided to form a Listeners' League to support the B stations in their claim for commercial broadcasting but the press were inclined to play down the move. The *Radio Record* (September 19, 1930) commented:

"The question now primarily is: Is advertising on the air to be allowed at all? Yes or no? We certainly believe that the right answer to that question is no. In the first place it is against British temperament. We do not wish our homes to be invaded by advertising in our hours of relaxation—we seek amusement and entertainment. We do not wish to be fooled by the insidious lure of tooth paste . . . the inception of general advertising on the air, in our opinion, would be an invasion of the rights of listeners, and would be met with strong antagonism by both press and public throughout the Dominion."

Nine years later the same journal sought the monopolistic right to publish programme data of the Commercial Broadcasting Service.

Other B stations followed the lead of Dunedin, and as a result a New Zealand Listeners' League was formed. Fresh interest in the move was provided by the general manager of the Broadcasting Company who stated that he did not think the B stations should be called upon to make any payment to A.P.R.A. as the Company paid six per cent of its revenue. If the B stations increased the number of listeners, then A.P.R.A. would benefit anyway.

No payment was made but added interest was aroused in June 1931, when the Hon. J. B. Donald announced that the Government had authorised a form of sponsored programmes for the B stations. The concession was limited, stations being permitted to announce only the name of the sponsor at the beginning and end of each programme, but no product mention was permitted. The concession was valueless as a means of securing much needed revenue, and there was some speculation as to why the gesture had been made, for it was known that the United Party Government was not as close to the press as its predecessors in office. It was suggested that the press was being



threatened with commercial broadcasting unless they eased attacks on the Government's financial policy.

It was obvious from the start that trouble would be experienced in defining just what announcements would be permitted, and when the regulations were but five days old 1ZQ Auckland was ordered off the air for a breach and other stations were warned. The *Radio Record* which criticised the Minister's statement concerning the permitting of sponsored programmes, adopted a "told you so" attitude. In the issue of June 20, 1931, we read:

"Our informants in practically every case have stated that they have closed sets down rather than listen to advertising matter of the character used. This endorses the view we have always held that British instincts rebel against exploitation of the air for advertising purposes."

Considerable trouble was being experienced in interpreting the maze of regulations surrounding the broadcasting of these programmes and at one stage the Director-General of the Post and Telegraph Department suggested that the regulations were necessary to discourage firms from operating a B station, as non-broadcasting firms were placed at a disadvantage.

There was never a dull moment. Towards the end of 1931 the record manufacturers directed B stations to cease broadcasting records and warned that failure would result in a court injunction and a claim for substantial damages. The manufacturing combine controlled all records available and soon made it clear that they had no desire to negotiate with the B stations, but would accept a payment of 2s. 6d. per record per performance. The claim was too ludicrous to warrant serious attention and although some stations fell by the wayside the majority continued and defied the manufacturers.

The New Zealand Listeners' League suggested that the Board should extend protection to the B stations against pending copyright and mechanical right claims, but it was a forlorn hope. The B stations were back where they started, for the dispensation to promote limited sponsored programmes merely added to their troubles with additional irritating regulations.

The Broadcasting Board showed signs of alarm at the extent of public support for the stations, but resolutely refused all assistance on the grounds that their resources were required for a long-term policy.



It should be remembered that during these years the YA stations observed a "silent day" each week, some stations not commencing transmission until 3.00 p.m. so it was not surprising that the public welcomed the additional service given by B stations and were prepared to support their claims. Maybe there was a fascination about broadcasting, for despite their difficulties the number of B stations increased to seventeen in 1929, twenty-nine in 1930 and thirty-six in 1931—all living on optimism and voluntary offerings except those associated with business firms who could perhaps charge costs to advertising. The B stations rallied again and formed a New Zealand Alliance headed by 1ZR Auckland and 2ZW Wellington. This group was considerably more powerful than its predecessors and towards the end of 1932 petitioned Parliament for the right to advertise. In December a Parliamentary Committee referred the proposal to the Government for "favourable consideration", interest being aroused during the debate when members from both sides of the House supported the B stations as being necessary to the broadcasting system. The Labour Party was particularly vocal, only Mr. Walter Nash suggesting that the Government exercise care in granting advertising privileges. The Government agreed to relax the regulations but the Post and Telegraph Department did not receive any instructions, so the previous regulations remained in force. This, of course, left the stations in exactly the same position as previously. The Post and Telegraph officials were very zealous in enforcing the regulations and in June 1933, the district telegraph engineer acting for the Postmaster-General, suspended the licence of 1ZR Auckland, ordering it to cease transmission forthwith. A schedule was attached indicating the breaches committed by the station, one of which read: "We will now have Mr. Rimmer who will entertain us with 'The Romance of the Coffee Cup'." The Post Office contended that Mr. Rimmer's name should have been omitted as he was in the coffee trade. 1ZR engaged the Auckland Town Hall for a protest meeting and claimed that some of these regulations were only enforced against the B stations and the YA stations could mention a speaker's name even when the talk concerned his profession.

1ZR was back on the air the following week. The department alleged eleven breaches of the regulations. The station denied all of them but was allowed back on the air by promising not to break the regulations again.

One crisis ended and another began. Now it was the record



manufacturers who returned to the fray and served notice on the B stations that the use of their records was prohibited but the prohibition would not apply to the YA stations or the subsidised B stations.

An appeal was made to the Government to step in but the Postmaster-General said it was a matter of negotiations between the stations and the gramophone companies, but as the B stations had no resources it looked as though they were being tossed to the wolves.

The B stations now set out to organise all stations and clubs, the majority of them being grouped behind the two most powerful of their number, 1ZR Auckland and 2ZW Wellington, both of whom were owned by well-established business firms. The movement gained momentum for it was obvious that now, at least, public opposition to the Government's radio policy would make itself felt.

The Government's reaction to the move was immediate and the public read in their newspapers one morning that the Government had purchased 1ZR Auckland and 2ZW Wellington. It appeared that the Government had made quite a good offer and informed the owners that if they didn't accept they would be forced off the air, as sponsored programmes were going to be prohibited and the gramophone companies would also make it impossible for stations to continue. The owners were certainly in a cleft stick. They were instructed that no publicity must be given to the negotiations and they were given very little time to decide the issue. Although the purchase had actually been completed, neither the listeners nor the clubs associated with the two stations were informed at the time, and many donations were actually acknowledged over the air after the Government had acquired the stations. No one could blame these two business firms for protecting their interests. The extraordinary part of the whole affair, however, was that the Broadcasting Board was not consulted and the press provided their first knowledge of the event. In a public statement the Board said they had no idea what the Government intended with the stations.

The Government's move was a shrewd one for it eliminated the spearhead of the B station attack. Listeners associated with these two stations protested strongly through letters which poured into the Government and the daily newspapers. A newspaper edict went forth to certain staffs that the campaign was not to be encouraged and many letters, including a strongly worded statement from the Listeners' League, were suppressed



in at least one Wellington paper. On November 10, 1933, the Postmaster-General, Mr. Hamilton, officially removed any doubts that may have existed concerning the Government's attitude to the B stations. He defended the purchase of the three stations (3ZC Christchurch being acquired later) on the grounds that yeoman service had been rendered when the national coverage was inadequate and the Government considered there was a moral, if not a legal, obligation to assist these stations. The Postmaster-General pointed out that for many years patent rights in New Zealand were covered by an agreement between Amalgamated Wireless and the Government. However, that agreement would expire in some six months and the B stations would then have to shift for themselves. Claims were also being made by the record companies and, in addition, the Government had decided that as from March 31, 1934, sponsored programmes would be prohibited.

All the B stations rendered a service to the cause of broadcasting but this applied particularly to those stations located in regional areas where the reception from national stations was indifferent. Yet the Government purchased three stations, one of which had not been operating very long and all located in cities adequately served by national stations. The prices paid were: 1ZR Auckland £2,200; 2ZW Wellington £2,300; 3ZC Christchurch £600.

Mr. E. J. Howard stated in Parliament that the Government had paid £600 for 3ZC which had a short time previously been purchased for approximately £150.

The Government was out of touch with public opinion when it decided to eliminate the B stations and the screw was applied ruthlessly if not clumsily. Here are two examples:

In 1934 1ZB Auckland finalised negotiations with Charles Ulm, famous associate of Kingsford Smith, for a radio coverage of his Pacific flight which was to terminate at Auckland. Ulm agreed to send messages from the 'plane to a New Zealand network of B stations and, on arrival, to broadcast on relay. This was a great scoop but the Post and Telegraph Department refused permission without giving any reasons. When 1ZB asked if there was any way of overcoming the difficulty, the Auckland spokesman said: "No. It will be banned in any case."

1ZB organised the largest public meeting ever held in Auckland when some twenty thousand people gathered to hear its spokesmen explain the efforts made to bring the broadcast to listeners. This ban, he said, was the last of a series of petty



irritations that was undermining the foundation of the B stations and could no longer be tolerated. There was only one thing to counteract the restrictive policy of the Government and that was direct political action. The meeting pledged support to deal with "this vicious interference with the rights of the listening public".

Up till now the Government had maintained a discreet silence, but following this meeting the Postmaster-General issued a statement. He denied that the Government had been obstructive and added: "It is entirely wrong to suppose that any discrimination is exercised to the detriment of 1ZB or any other B station." He went on to explain that it was contrary to regulations for any private person to pick up messages for broadcast and it was on these grounds that the Department acted. The statement concluded: "It is significant that, although there are some twenty-four B stations in operation in New Zealand, no serious complaints are made of the control exercised by the department." This statement was certainly incorrect as every station had complained "loud, long and bitterly". When this statement appeared, 1ZB telegraphed the Minister:

"Re broadcast of Ulm's flight your statement released per press association is definitely contrary to fact. Can prove conclusively that ban was applied by your departmental representative. Here in reply to definite questions they stated ban would apply in any case. Will you please correct statement."

At the last minute the department offered to receive messages from the 'plane for a fee of £5 and hand them to 1ZB for broadcast. It was too late for the flight had already commenced. This was Ulm's last flight for the great airman and his gallant companions went to their death beneath the Pacific Ocean.

There was considerable discussion about this incident in subsequent weeks. Statements were made that Ulm had endeavoured to negotiate with the Board for broadcast rights, but the latter had refused to pay £250. Ulm's representative on the other hand stated the Board wished to place unnecessary restrictions on the broadcast.

Christchurch was the venue for the next incident. Cricket enthusiasts will recall the England v. Australia test cricket series played in England in 1934 and how a Sydney station engaged cricket personalities to broadcast a "ball by ball" description from material supplied by cable. The New Zealand Board would



not extend the relay, so 3ZM Christchurch secured permission to remain on the air until 5.00 a.m. and handle the broadcast. Public reaction was favourable, but after the first night the Radio Inspector refused permission to continue on succeeding nights and instructed the B station to remain silent for five hours to make up for the additional time on the air the previous night. There was a great outcry from listeners and the press. The Christchurch *Press* made enquiries and informed its readers that "At present the authorities are not permitting relays from overseas stations." Yet on the same page the Broadcasting Board announced that it had completed arrangements for a re-broadcast of the All Black matches in Australia. It appeared there were two sets of regulations—one for the B stations and another for the Broadcasting Board.

To-day it seems difficult to believe that any Government would act in such a childish fashion. Their reasoning suggested that if the Board did not handle a particular broadcast, the B stations should not be permitted to offer their services to listeners. However, these two incidents aroused many thousands of listeners who definitely lined up with the B stations for the fight that could not be long delayed.

Meanwhile, the battle was being waged on the political front where the Prime Minister was requested to remove the ban on controversial matter and grant the B stations permission to earn revenue by advertising.

The answer was a very firm negative.

During the Imprest Supply Bill on September 25, 1935, Mr. Savage strongly criticised the Government's attitude to the B stations and promised that when Labour became the Government they would be developed. The Hon. Adam Hamilton in reply admitted that the B stations had done good work but it would be unwise to spend capital in building them up at this stage. A Government member, Mr. J. A. Nash (Palmerston North) considered the Government should do something for the B stations which many people preferred to the YA stations.

Obviously 1935 was to be a crucial year for the present position could not last. The Hon. Adam Hamilton summed up the situation when he said: "There are about twenty B stations and, apart from six or seven that the Broadcasting Board subsidises . . . they are in the anomalous position of having no revenue and no rights."

In this instance the stations were in agreement with Mr. Adam Hamilton, but reminded him that it was his Government's policy



to strip them of all rights by refusing them permission to earn revenue. The stations were hampered by harassing regulations and harsh interpretations, they could not even announce the label name of any record although the national stations did so. They were not permitted to raise funds for any charitable purpose, could not appeal for funds, and if they wished to broadcast any special function outside ordinary broadcasting hours, they could only do so by curtailing transmission the equivalent number of hours. There were actually occasions when stations were three minutes late in signing off and were requested to furnish an official explanation for overstaying their broadcasting hours. The ban on controversial matter was applied one-sidedly against B stations, and as we have seen the Government was to go to considerable lengths to prevent the B stations from broadcasting some important event, even after the Broadcasting Board had intimated their unwillingness to carry the broadcasts.

With the 1935 election coming up a further edict came forth. No person seeking parliamentary honours would be permitted to speak from any radio station on any topic whatever. The ban applied immediately and the first incident occurred when a Wellington station broadcast a public function attended by the Governor-General. The King's representative was welcomed by a person who had announced his candidature for the forthcoming election but when this public figure rose to speak the broadcast was cut and was resumed when the Governor-General replied. Later the ban was broken by the national stations, and afterwards 1ZB deliberately broke the ban on two occasions but the Government did not take action.

The B stations were in the political arena, but before any definite plan of action was adopted it was decided to make one final appeal to the Prime Minister. The operators of some twenty stations waited on the Rt. Hon. Mr. Forbes who promised to investigate the whole position and communicate with the Federation, but as the weeks passed and no word was received, the campaign was launched.

The B stations were ill-equipped for a political battle. They had no funds and they realised that political action would divide their listeners, but there was no alternative. Each station did what it could in its own locality. Thousands of copies of a booklet "The Scandal of New Zealand Broadcasting" flooded the country, circulars were issued, and the attack was carried by means of direct mail, with individual stations and enthusiasts footing the bill. Every avenue was used and listeners were urged

not to be misled by the promises of candidates. A questionnaire was drawn up and submitted to the leaders of the three political parties who were asked to give a "Yes" or "No" answer to eleven questions. The Government Party declined to acknowledge the questionnaire, the Democrat Party came more than half-way, and the Labour Party promised full support to the B stations. This questionnaire played a very important part in the radio campaign, the Government Party candidates being attacked from the floor of many meetings. A further booklet "More Scandal" was published which set out in detail the result of the questionnaire. Some Government candidates became very perturbed at the swing and urged the Prime Minister to make some statement. In the South Island the 3ZM Club of Christchurch issued a ballot paper inviting listeners to become jurors in the case "The Government v. B. Stations in New Zealand". Government members protested to Cabinet and first the Postmaster-General, then the Minister of Finance, promised that the whole question of broadcasting would be investigated after the election. The B stations redoubled their efforts and the campaign went on unabated until the Sunday prior to the election, when 1ZB was jammed during "Man in the Street" session.

Undoubtedly the Government's popularity had been on the wane for some considerable time and the depression years had taken their toll. Nevertheless the B stations' question became a major issue, and a factor in the defeat of the Government at the polls in November 1935.

The B stations were jubilant and looked to the newly elected Government to solve many of the problems that had been besetting them throughout the years . . . optimists to the very end.



*The B Stations' Demise*

THE B STATIONS had every reason to be pleased with the outcome of the 1935 elections for the new Prime Minister in his first utterance on the subject said: "B stations are going to live."

The Postmaster-General, the Hon. F. Jones, gave the first intimation that no hasty decision on the new radio policy could be expected, hinting that six or twelve months might pass before it was announced. "There is one thing certain," said Mr. Jones. "We have given a definite promise that we will protect and assist the existing B stations and we will carry out that promise."

The parliamentary debate on the Broadcasting Board's annual report considered on April 16, 1936, brought Government statements of a more cautious nature. The Prime Minister again repeated his promise but was careful to point out that he had never promised advertising rights—that his public utterances meant that these stations would have to be kept alive by subsidies or given the right to earn revenue, but that the Government would decide what course should be followed.

Mr. Savage was reminded that he and his party were on record as favouring commercial broadcasting from the B stations, but there was little comfort in his reply.

As the months passed, the lot of the B stations became very difficult and they were in a worse position than prior to the election. Political activities alienated assistance from a number of supporters, while others ceased contributions under the impression that with the change of Government their troubles had been settled. Despite constant prodding, the Government's policy remained obscure for seven months, when the Postmaster-General made this statement on June 9, 1936:

"In regard to the B stations, I know Opposition members will raise the question of the support promised to be given but I would point out that prior to and during the election, as in fact, ever since I have been a member of this House, members of the Labour Party have always stressed the importance of assisting B stations. We contended they should be allowed to live . . . some of the stations have obtained a

popularity even greater than the national stations; and when one thinks that the pioneering of broadcasting in this country was done by the B stations, one realises that they are entitled to all the consideration the Government can give. Objection may be raised to a portion of the licence fees being handed over to these stations by way of subsidy but I would like to point out that this is in line with the policy of the British Government in respect of the B.B.C. . . . I know that opinions have been expressed that we are going to grant advertising rights to the B stations. We are not prepared to give them advertising rights and I think that all the B stations will accept the decision of the Government that they shall receive a subsidy."

It was obvious that the B stations had no place in the Government's plan for a broadcasting service. Apparently it was one thing to make promises while in opposition and another to carry them out when in office. The stations were in no mood, however, to take a tolerant view of the difficulties of politicians, for the position of the twenty-two remaining operators was desperate. Another deputation invaded Parliament and by 1936 some individuals were very familiar figures around offices in Parliament.

Postmaster-General Jones was the spokesman for Cabinet. Yes, the Government would subsidise *those stations considered necessary*, but in the next breath he stated the Government wished to purchase *all* the B stations because it had been decided to make commercial broadcasting a State monopoly.

Some of the stations refused the Government's offer to buy and desired to open negotiations for a subsidy. But no finality could be reached on this point, the Government stating that it could not discuss subsidies until it knew which stations would sell. Meanwhile, the Government pressed on with its plans for a State-owned commercial network. 1ZB Auckland was acquired in July, and in the following November became the first station of the commercial network, with Scrimgeour appointed controller of what was to be known as the National Commercial Broadcasting Service.

The B stations were now at gun-point. Forces previously antagonistic now became allies. The press featured their case, and the Opposition in Parliament called on the Labour Government to honour its pledge. Public protest meetings were called, many prominent people being found on the platform.



There was no doubt the Government was not handling the situation very diplomatically and many people questioned their political honesty. Stations endeavoured to get a clear statement on the subsidy question but the Government was very evasive, stating they would consider subsidising stations only where justified in the light of the requirements of the broadcasting service as a whole. The Government refused to indicate which stations would fall into this category, or what amount of subsidy would be payable. This was the end of the road. If they sold, at least they would know what they were getting, whereas if they held on they might not get any subsidy at all, and would lose their chance of sale. As the Rev. W. Averill stated at an Auckland protest meeting:

"To say the B stations are given the option of selling to the Government or remaining in their present state with a subsidy deceives nobody. It is only necessary to make the subsidy small enough and they are forced to sell or go off the air."

It became just a matter of securing the best possible price, with the Government as the only bidder, for by legislation the operators were prohibited from disposing of their assets to any other buyer. It had long been the cry of the Labour Party that justice should be done to the B stations, but instead of justice they were forced to sell their equipment at valuation, with no provision for goodwill or gratuity for services rendered. In 1937, two years after Labour came into power, the B stations, with two exceptions, regretfully accepted the Government's offer, sold their assets, and surrendered their licences.

It was an anti-climax. For years they had put up a very spirited defence against successive Governments, Broadcasting Company, Broadcasting Board, Post Office, A.P.R.A. and the gramophone companies. They had held on tenaciously against all opposition, but now they meekly surrendered and handed in their chips. They appeared to be weary of it all, at the same time realising they had outlived their usefulness and there was no place for them in the new era. It was a case of saving what was possible from the wreck and "going quietly". With Long-fellow they could "fold their tents like the Arabs, and silently steal away".

The B stations who had pioneered New Zealand broadcasting were no more.

These stations have never been given credit for their contri-

bution to broadcasting in this country. They possessed drive and initiative in an amateur way, and many of the broadcasting services accepted by listeners to-day were first introduced by these people. Throughout their long stay they lacked "lobby" support, and were never taken very seriously by the politicians. If business interests in the early days had followed the lead of other countries, our broadcasting story might read very differently and we might have had a chain of privately-owned commercial stations similar in pattern to Australia, the United States and Canada, competing with a State-owned non-commercial service. It is a matter of opinion as to whether such a development might not have led to a more vigorous style of broadcasting with two independent networks competing for listeners' patronage.



*The Pattern Emerges 1935-43*

THE POLITICAL upheaval of 1935 swept the Labour Party into power for the first time, and changes in broadcasting were expected, for Labour was united in opposing Board control, was critical of the operations of the N.Z.B.S., had allied itself with the B stations, could see nothing objectionable in broadcast advertising, and desired State-controlled broadcasting.

It was apparent that Labour's object was the complete nationalisation of broadcasting and this frightened certain interests who feared that Mr. Savage might use a State-owned service to combat the influence of the press. In an interview given on January 12, 1936 Mr. Savage removed any lingering doubts on this score. He said:

"The old avenues of publicity—the newspapers—have been deliberately closed to us or are fading away. Radio, this new means of communicating our work and aims to the public is being enthusiastically taken up by the Labour Government."

The press opposed the Government on all points and claimed to represent public opinion. The listeners were satisfied with the existing control, commercial broadcasting was unpopular, politicians could not be trusted to govern radio, the licence fee should be reduced—these and many others were the arguments used.

The Government proceeded cautiously and it was not until June 1936 that legislation was introduced. The Board was abolished, and the control of broadcasting was placed in the hands of a Minister, with provision made for the appointment of an Advisory Council to consist of not more than five members. This council was never appointed. Power was also taken to establish a National Commercial Broadcasting Service operated by the State.

This was to be the new pattern and it presented a rather unique method of broadcasting control. The New Zealand Broadcasting Service owned and operated by the State, would comprise two separate networks both independently administered

but subject to ministerial control. The National Service would present all types of programmes from education to light comedy, classical music to jazz, talks on current affairs, sporting events, outside relays from race meetings and football matches, religious services, local artists and parliamentary broadcasts. In other words these stations were expected to provide programmes that would appeal to varying sections of the audience, on the assumption that listeners paying an annual licence fee were entitled at some time or other to the type of programmes they preferred.

The Commercial Service on the other hand would broadcast programmes different in many respects from the YA stations. The first aim of the ZB stations (as they were known) was to give entertainment acceptable to a large proportion of the listeners, for commercial broadcasting depends for its existence on advertising revenue which is only available when stations have secured a large audience. This resulted in a tendency to exploit programmes of popular appeal. It was made clear from the outset that the ZB stations should be self-supporting and would not receive any financial assistance from listeners' funds. Above all the two networks would be competing for an audience.

The plan was roughly criticised in press and Parliament on the grounds that the Government would use the microphone for political purposes. The public did not appear to be unduly concerned, but some members of Parliament were very vocal. In 1936 Mr. S. G. Smith (Opposition, New Plymouth) said:

"I want to put on record my opinion that in the days to come the air will be flooded with purely party political propaganda and those in opposition to the Government will have their case heard very infrequently."

Hansard reports the Hon. Peter Fraser as refuting Mr. Smith's contention in these words:

"We want our opponents on the air equal with ourselves, time for time, as we have always wanted. . . . If Labour did anything else it would be betraying its own principles, betraying that trust reposed in it by the people, betraying the highest principles of conduct and equity."

The Prime Minister and members of the Government claimed that the newspapers lost no opportunity of attacking and misrepresenting their actions and motives, and made it quite clear that they in turn would take any step necessary to combat the



press. The microphone was to be the weapon used. The Prime Minister, Mr. M. J. Savage, in intimating his intention of using the radio services said, "There is no other way by which I can reach the people. I cannot rely upon the daily newspapers because we have never had a fair run from them."

The Opposition contended that the Government eagerly used the microphone for propaganda purposes, and in the years following 1935, ministerial appearances on the air were certainly numerous. However, the Labour Government on assuming power embarked on a spectacular plan of social and economic reconstruction, the very nature of which made good radio copy. Whether the fears expressed have been realised is a matter of opinion, but it is significant that during the next thirteen years the Opposition did not have any opportunity of stating a case against Government policy, other than the broadcasting of parliamentary debates, or in election addresses.

The new Government lost no time in dismissing the Broadcasting Board and placing the national stations under the control of a Director of Broadcasting. The successful applicant was Professor James Shelley, whose task was not made any easier by the introduction of commercial broadcasting under a separate Controller.

I do not think Savage has ever received the credit for the vision he displayed in reorganising the broadcasting service. At this stage the YA stations were literally dying on their feet, their administrators completely lacking broadcasting "know how", while the ZB stations were getting under way with the enthusiasm usually associated with a three-ringed circus. On the surface it appeared that the senior service was in urgent need of a blood transfusion, and Savage supplied it in the person of Professor James Shelley, thus ensuring that for the first time these stations were going to have a strong man to direct the service, whose presence and stature would give encouragement and enthusiasm to those who had almost given up hope of being able to compete with the vigorous ZB stations.

On paper, Shelley appeared to be the ideal man to control the National Service. A Professor of Education at twenty-nine, with service in World War I which he had entered as a private and emerged a major, invalided home in 1917, posted Chief Instructor at the War Office School of Education, and then back to the University, to New Zealand where his occupancy of the Chair of Education at Canterbury College made him a legend in his own lifetime.



His appointment as Director of Broadcasting caused some surprise, but a great deal of interest. He was known as a dominating and powerful personality who expressed his views and supported many minority causes for the simple reason that he believed in them. He was a progressive thinker, tireless in community work, an authority on drama, art and education. He detested snobbery, was quite fearless and always nailed his colours to the mast. He was just the type of man who would appeal to Prime Minister Savage, although some people were somewhat awed by his standing and the title "professor".

Many were very curious to see how the new Director would react. Here was a man possessing considerable strength of character and enthusiasm, with a strong academic background, given one of the biggest jobs in the country. It was a natural assumption that he would desire to make many changes, and the fact that the ZB stations had made their appearance with light satisfying entertainment, suggested competition. Hasty action at this stage would have brought the YA stations, founded on an intellectual basis, into conflict with the ZB stations as purveyors of light popular programmes.

The future policy of the Director was decided on this point. There was to be no immediate change in programming policy, and the National Broadcasting Service was to proceed cautiously and judiciously towards the matter of public testing, rather than in open competition with the ZB stations. This policy was sound, particularly when it was realised there is no such thing as a constant radio audience to any one station. The radio audience is a shifting mass, for modern receiving sets enable listeners to switch from station to station in search of programme appeal. The National Broadcasting Service did not have to compete for listeners to survive, as they were assured of a steady income from licence fees and possessed alternative stations in the main centres. At this stage it would have been easy for the newly appointed Director to win popular acclaim by concentrating on light programmes from all YA stations, but on the other hand he was in a strong position, inasmuch as he had the main YA stations for handling higher types of programmes while the smaller auxiliary stations could provide light entertainment.

One revolutionary change concerned the broadcasting of parliamentary debates through Station 2YA. The desirability of these broadcasts had been suggested previously when Labour was in opposition, but the idea had never been taken seriously by previous Governments. The Labour Government claimed



that important speeches by its members had been suppressed or condensed by the press while Opposition speeches had received publicity. The Rt. Hon. M. J. Savage announced that for this reason the Government would take steps to see that the national stations would acquaint the people with the deliberations of their representatives. Parliament was on the air.

The press attacked the Government on this move. What right had the Government to monopolise the radio stations for parliamentary debates? Who wanted to listen to politicians on the air? Listeners would switch to Australian stations or turn the radio off. Listeners would refrain from renewing licences. These were some of the arguments used, but the initial broadcast from Parliament brought astonishing results. Appreciative mail poured in to the Prime Minister's office, and overnight Prime Minister Savage became a radio personality. In 1936 New Zealand was in the throes of what could be termed a political revolution, and parliamentary debates, far from being dull and uninteresting, were vitally alive and real. The Government possessed a greater number of radio stars than the Opposition and it was not long before both parties were jockeying for favourable times on the air; for instead of a speaker addressing some eighty-four members he spoke to an unseen audience of many thousands and he had to equip himself accordingly. These broadcasts have proved popular with listeners, and in general have tended to raise the standard of parliamentary debates. Newspaper reputations were debunked and back benchers came into their own. The new Government contributed something when it instituted parliamentary broadcasts. There was no public demand for such a service, and the press almost without exception was hostile, but nevertheless the debates, which "caught on" with the public, are now a recognised part of our programmes. This success was surprising because the standard of debate was not high, and many speeches included liberal doses of "in regard to" and "in connection with". Many of the speakers rambled, stumbled and expressed themselves in the phraseology of schoolboys. Perhaps this very naturalness appealed, and gave the impression that listeners were eavesdropping on the most exclusive club in New Zealand. Speakers made errors. The interjections had something of a village meeting atmosphere, for they were not witty but had the advantage of being unrehearsed and natural. Maybe the listeners regard the broadcasts as a relief from the carefully planned and presented programmes; but, whatever the reason, the experiment proved a success.



The pattern was complete when the National Commercial Broadcasting Service (N.C.B.S.) commenced operations in 1936. Certain critics were disappointed when there was no mention of pink pills or corsets. On the contrary the programmes contained brightness, novelty, and originality to a degree previously unknown to New Zealand listeners. One of the most enthusiastic advocates of the new medium was the *Radio Record* which four years previously had written:

"Once open the doors of broadcasting to the tender mercies of the modern advertiser and you will not only sacrifice the sanctity of the home, but point the way to the prostitution of good taste and decency. . . . If you can associate the Hungarian Rhapsody with crustless cheese, or the Unfinished Symphony with an alleged cure for perspiring feet, then by all means have your sponsored programmes—you will get your fill; but take heed, a real danger is upon us. . . ."

The Hon. Adam Hamilton and other members claimed the introduction of commercial broadcasting would destroy the broadcasting system which previous Governments had modelled on the B.B.C.; that standards of value would be adversely affected, and the moral tone of programmes lowered. In support of this latter charge he referred to a recording "Sandy Joins the Nudist Club" which he alleged was broadcast from 1ZB.

The Parliamentary debates of 1937 made quite entertaining reading.

Scrimgeour, as Commercial Service Controller, was not a shy retiring violet in this controversy and did not hesitate to use the microphone and the printed page where it was available, to defend himself and the Commercial Service.

The barrage of criticism directed at commercial broadcasting and its Controller did have an adverse effect, and many businesses refused to use the new medium. Political issues and loyalties were also involved, so at first the majority of advertising agencies were not keen to rush into radio advertising until the smoke of battle had settled and they could evaluate its worth, but this did not take long.

The main problem affecting the administration was the relationship between the National and Commercial Broadcasting Services. When the Commercial Service extended to Wellington, canvassing for business was instituted, and the advertising agents in seeking business contracts stressed the coverage and



effectiveness of the new 2ZB, which was to be the call sign of the capital city commercial station.

It was natural they would assess the popularity of the other local national stations, for the number of competitive stations would have an important bearing on an advertiser's decision to buy time on 2ZB. Some dismay was caused when within forty-eight hours of 2ZB commencing operations, the National Service came on the air with a new station 2YD, which handled bright popular entertainment with a commercial presentation, even to the gong and chimes, previously scorned by the N.B.S. as savouring of showmanship.

Advertisers were angry, accusing the Government of unfair tactics, and epitomised their feelings thus:

"On the one hand we have the Government creating an organisation to take advertisers' money, and on the other hand they create a service to take away the advertisers' audience."

2YD did adversely affect the commercial audience. With commercial broadcasting now installed in two cities and shortly to be extended to the South Island, it was natural that some rivalry would exist between the two services; this feeling was evident in the programme field where competition could be expected in transcription programmes. Transcription producers were playing off the advertiser with his allocation against the National Service with its licence fees, and many advertisers claimed that some sphere of influence should have been dictated by the Government, quoting experiences to bear out this contention. One example concerned the manufacturers of a product who purchased twenty-six episodes of the drama "Coronets of England" for playing over the ZB network. A second series was available, but the firm decided to check the public reaction before ordering the balance, and when the second order was placed they were informed that the series had been bought by the National Service. The sponsor was faced with competition on his own programme, and while the first series was playing on ZB, national stations programmed the second series, thus robbing the advertiser of some of the popularity of the feature which his money had created. Other cases were quoted. An Australian oil company programmed a series, "Ports of Call", and the ZB stations offered to purchase the series for £500. But Australian interests, playing the two services, finally sold the feature to the N.B.S. for a sum greatly in excess of its actual



value, for it was stated at the time that the oil company had secured Australian and New Zealand rights to this feature for £250. One Australian source stated they secured £1,000 from the national stations by means of this jockeying.

Another firm featured "Dad and Dave" on the Australian stations, and desired to extend their purchase to New Zealand, only to discover that the N.B.S. was a competitor. When bidding ceased, the latter emerged victorious.

In the early days of commercial broadcasting this competition embarrassed the ZB stations, for they lacked funds, and the advertisers were cautious of the new medium. Later on when commercial broadcasting really made large profits they could have more than held their own, but amalgamation of the two services resulted in a sole purchasing committee operating for both divisions.

During the years 1935-43 the YA stations progressed considerably. Technically the National Service is one of the best equipped for its size in the world. On the programme side they cover a very wide field for contact has been maintained between the N.B.S., the Education Department, Boards, Advisory Committees, and some hundreds of schools who participate in an educational hook-up of YA stations. The broadcasts to schools are organised on a national basis, policy being determined by a committee representing broadcasting and educational interests. The sessions are broadcast at set times during school hours. The Education Department's Correspondence Schools also broadcast weekly sessions to their pupils throughout the country.

Particular attention centres on sports coverage, and commentaries from racing and trotting meetings, football, wrestling, boxing and swimming matches number hundreds yearly, in addition to talks on various aspects of sport.

Visits by overseas artists have also been a feature on the YA stations, and many world-famous figures have visited these shores under contract to the N.B.S.

During recent years YA activity in connection with outside broadcasts has increased considerably and microphones are likely to be found at any outstanding function possessing historical and general listener interest.

Re-broadcasts from overseas have also increased, and prior to the war most notable events and speeches throughout the Empire were broadcast by the National Service, while commentaries on test matches and other important international sports fixtures were similarly brought to New Zealand homes. In 1936



a limited news service was broadcast, but generally speaking the standard of the N.B.S. news service left much to be desired.

These years saw the development of a pattern in broadcasting. Prior to 1936 the YA stations rarely went outside the studio for programme material, and for that reason the immediate listener acceptance of commercial broadcasting was due to the very unorthodox programmes. The commercial stations carried the microphone to the people, and the zest and vigour of many of these broadcasts won approval; they were something quite new and listeners appreciated a different slant on what constituted entertainment.

Although any form of listener research has always been studiously avoided by the authorities it has been established that the ZB stations during this period secured the allegiance of at least 80 per cent of city listeners. Admittedly, commercial broadcasting commenced operations at a time when the YA stations were at an all-time low in popularity, with the emphasis very much on the higher forms of culture. Their announcers were precise and standardised, and were exceedingly dull. The programmes lacked appeal, the talks were discourses and quite uninspiring. Standardisation was the goal, variety and initiative were not encouraged, for some of the administrators were old mentally as well as physically.

However, the advent of commercial broadcasting had an exhilarating effect on the YA stations for within a comparatively short space of time they emerged from seclusion to do battle for their place in the sun, and both services gave of their best.

The outbreak of war in 1939 was to halt the march forward, but that fateful September night did not catch either service unprepared. In the preceding months plans had been formulated so that when the final break came both services commenced operations under emergency regulations. Close contact was maintained with the Organisation for National Security, censorship was imposed on all broadcast material, and every station maintained a listening watch on 2YA so that in an emergency a complete national hook-up could be arranged in a matter of seconds.

Broadcasting can have any one of several relationships to public opinion but its importance as an indirect instrument of war cannot be denied. Its potentialities are limitless as a medium of information and entertainment on the home front, and in New Zealand it was used to keep the public informed on the war situation without emotion or hysteria. Arrangements were



made to broadcast several daily news bulletins from London with the object of giving full and authentic information to the public, the facts being broadcast as soon as they were confirmed, and when the release of the information would not prove useful to the enemy. Thus there was no sensationalism on the air, no "unconfirmed reports" to confuse the listeners' minds or delight enemy listening posts. An average of seven of these broadcasts were heard daily on all main YA and ZB stations and in addition the YA stations frequently included the London commentaries handled by such well-known news analysts and commentators as Wickham Stead. These news sessions and various commentaries occupied up to three hours of the daily transmission from YA stations. There were people who considered that a virile nation should have the opportunity of hearing our own commentators handling similar sessions, particularly in view of the fact that at least two of our sons have achieved a measure of success with the B.B.C. in this field. The commercial stations often suggested this, but the Government was adamant, and the timid news policy of peace was carried into total war. No New Zealand news commentators were permitted.

With the passing of each year of war greater use was made of the broadcasting service, the programme consisting of talks by prominent speakers, special morale building shows such as "We Work For Victory", and propaganda programmes such as "This Is War", and "Tell The People". It is gratifying to note that many of these programmes were produced by New Zealanders in the studios of the N.B.S. and N.C.B.S. or on location. Instruction sessions for trainees in the Air Force were presented, together with a weekly session designed to interest the Air Training Corps. In addition, both services co-operated fully with the national and patriotic agencies, and the radio resources of the country were available to all actively associated with the war effort. It was confidently claimed that radio was the greatest single factor in promoting such campaigns as "Bonds for Bombers", war savings, liberty loans, recruiting drives, waste campaigns, etc.

Another little-known activity was the listening watch and monitoring station operating in Wellington. Throughout the day and night, watch was maintained on Empire and certain Axis stations and facilities were available for instant recording day and night. Speeches or notable talks by the leaders of the United Nations were frequently broadcast at difficult times for New



Zealand consumption, so the listening watch would record the speech, and play it at a convenient time. Japanese broadcasts in English were monitored for information concerning names of prisoners of war and were made available to the proper authority.

Undoubtedly New Zealand radio accomplished much on the home front. The wide dissemination of news helped to stir people out of their apathy, commentaries kept them informed of the strategic principles involved in the war, while the entertainment of both YA and ZB helped to retain our national sanity. Every care had to be taken to see that the public did not receive too much war publicity and direction, and a proper balance between war and the normal state of living was maintained lest listeners' interests in the war effort be lessened. Programmes, both national and local, appealed for enrolment in the armed forces, for the support of the Government's measures against inflation, directed the country's spending power, and generally stimulated national thinking. These broadcasts went on day after day, reaching more New Zealanders than had ever been affected by any single medium. As never before, YA and ZB efforts proved that, given the chance, radio can entertain, inform and inspire a New Zealand democracy.

There is no doubt in my mind that the ZB stations were never fully extended in support of the war effort. After the death of Mr. Savage and the appointment of Peter Fraser as Prime Minister, relations between the Government and Scrimgeour became very strained, to say the least, and political bickerings clouded the minds of certain Cabinet Ministers who appeared to regard the ZB stations as Scrimgeour's personal property, and therefore involved the staff in the political wranglings. As a result the ZB stations had a number of clashes and suffered a degree of frustration when many ambitious ideas were quietly pigeon-holed. The service could obtain very little action on certain recommendations, and there was no encouragement to bring any individual approach to programmes. It almost appeared as though the war situation was being used to stifle the individuality of the N.C.B.S.

During this period I think the New Zealand listeners were well served, having a choice of programmes, with all the strengths and safeguards of State control and few of the weaknesses of a Government monopoly. It seemed a tragedy that the deteriorating relationships between the Minister and the Con-



troller of the commercial stations were to be the means of destroying the system, but such was the case.

Looking back it is clear that for many years New Zealand broadcasting had suffered from political interference, a handicap that has prevented it from developing any real individuality. In other words, radio spelt politics and the party in opposition could see little good in anything accomplished by the party in power. When Labour inaugurated commercial broadcasting, that was sufficient reason for the Opposition party wishing to strangle it at birth, and the war brought no let-up in political friction. When war broke out some members of the Opposition wished the Government to close all commercial stations. When the *Rangitane* was shelled and sunk off the New Zealand coast an Opposition speaker solemnly suggested that the German raider could have received information from a radio broadcast advertisement.

There were few subjects more capable of arousing controversy than broadcasting and its method of operation. With the death of M. J. Savage the Labour Cabinet became less interested in the ZB stations, although they were never slow in using their facilities when it suited them. The feud between the Minister and Controller retarded progress and the first move in what was to develop into open undignified brawling between the Minister and Controller came in 1942 when the Minister announced that as a war emergency the technical services of YA and ZB would be amalgamated under the Director of Broadcasting. The Minister stated that the object was to release the maximum number of technicians for more important war work: "The decision made is expected to result in the release of a considerable number of men within the next five or six weeks." An opinion was expressed that this was done more to humiliate Scrimgeour than help the war effort, for in the end less than twenty men were made available.

This step was the first move in the complete amalgamation, but the events leading to the change in control are examined in a separate chapter.

Despite the impact of war the ZB stations were rapidly overtaking the YA stations in all but technical fields. The N.C.B.S. was staffed by young enthusiastic executives who for the first time brought radio to the people and revolutionised listening habits. The ZB stations possessed vigour, and the breezy friendly style of the announcers was something entirely new to listeners.

This was a period of expansion and development, and the



listeners benefited from the dual system which appeared to suit New Zealand. There was something for everyone, a healthy spirit of competition was engendered, with the broadcasting industry striving to give maximum service.

The year 1943 was to bring many changes and the Government, after a number of false starts, finally took its courage in both hands, dismissed Scrimgeour and amalgamated the two broadcasting services under Professor James Shelley.

*The Years of the Locust 1943-51*

THE SACKING of Scrimgeour was not unexpected, for the welcome mat had long been withdrawn. Ministerial supporters became less vocal, recommendations were rejected, and the Minister wished to be consulted on various administrative matters that were formerly the prerogative of the Permanent Head. In short, Scrimgeour's authority was quietly but very effectively in process of being curtailed.

It had been obvious for some time that "Scrim" was not following the "party line" of the reconstructed Cabinet under Fraser, and that certain members, particularly Fraser and Nash, would like to dispose of him . . . but how? His popularity with a large section of the masses and his standing with the Industrial Wing of the Labour Party made such a move very difficult.

Then came Scrim's call-up for military service and the Government's failure to lodge an appeal, although they had appealed for other Permanent Heads.

Relations with Minister David Wilson were almost at breaking point, but Scrim took the unusual course of lodging a personal appeal, and subpoenaed Wilson. It was obvious that in the witness box the Minister was not going to be a friendly witness, for in answer to a question he stated, "This is open slather." In evidence he stated he would not appeal for any officer on principle and that he had someone in mind who could replace Scrimgeour, and from whom he would receive "more willing and loyal service". During and immediately after the case was heard, the following facts emerged. Scrim was in his forty-first year, was married with three children, and younger men with less family responsibility were being held in the Broadcasting Department on appeal. It was subsequently disclosed that the person designated by the Minister to replace Scrim was a married man with one child who was also held on appeal. When this fact was known the projected appointment was cancelled, the appeal withdrawn, and the man hustled into camp.

Scrim's appeal was dismissed but the opinion was expressed that the call-up was used as an instrument of "ministerial ven-



geance". New Zealand *Truth*, no friend of Scrimgeour's, made this comment in an editorial (March 3, 1943):

"Was Mr. Scrimgeour being rushed into the army ahead of others also eligible? There was a strong feeling abroad that he was . . . all of this had given rise to the belief that the Government, whilst anxious to get rid of Mr. Scrimgeour as Controller of Broadcasting, lacked the courage to take action, preferring rather to use the circumstances of a ballot call-up to rid themselves of him in an easy way. . . ."

The same day this editorial appeared the Prime Minister announced that Scrimgeour had been suspended for a "flagrant breach of instructions", but it appeared that Scrimgeour had deliberately set out to trap the Government and succeeded. The Auckland *Star* (March 3, 1943) made this point:

"Ministers in the late Government, and especially the Hon. Mr. Hamilton who was Minister of Broadcasting, must be amused as they observe the successive developments in the relationship of the present Government and Mr. C. G. Scrimgeour. They will remember the days, over seven years ago, when they considered that Mr. Scrimgeour was abusing the privileges of the radio position he then occupied. They tried, maladroitly, to check him—and the whole Dominion heard the furious protests of the then Opposition, which saw that both his broadcasts, and the Government's action against them, could be used to political advantage. The Opposition became the Government, and the late Mr. Savage who was not one to forget a friend, did not (then or later) forget Mr. Scrimgeour, who was appointed controller of a new broadcasting service at £1,500 a year. Those were the days. But later days have been increasingly less happy. The airing of Mr. Scrimgeour's views on this subject and that, which once seemed to the Government so right, has become wrong, for the fact is that the views of the Government and the views of Mr. Scrimgeour no longer coincide. If they did, it is improbable, to say the least, that the present Minister of Broadcasting would have gone before the Armed Forces Appeal Board to make the curious statement that Mr. Scrimgeour's departure from his post "would not affect the public interest, the war effort, or broadcasting one iota" and it is improbable also that this week he would have been suspended. The essential fact is that Mr. Scrimgeour was for political reasons appointed, for



political reasons he was allowed privileges accorded to no other man in the Dominion, and for political reasons those privileges have been curtailed, and are at present suspended. For the public the main lesson is the absolute necessity of removing the broadcasting system out of the reach of political influence."

During 1942 and 1943 the administration of the broadcasting service was carried out with the minimum of publicity while the personal bickerings between the Prime Minister, the Minister of Broadcasting and Scrimgeour occupied the centre of the political stage. On this occasion it really looked as though the latter had over-reached himself but he won this further round and humiliated Broadcasting Minister David Wilson. The Prime Minister announced Scrimgeour's reinstatement and added, "The misunderstanding has been explained and removed." The Government had undoubtedly lost prestige for it made a decision and could not stand by it—as the *Christchurch Press* remarked (March 8, 1943):

"But this exhibition of administrative disorder and failure at the centre and at the top—failure to move in time, failure to move wisely at last, failure even to move with enough care to avoid political humiliation—is too deeply disturbing to be smothered with a word."

However, Scrimgeour's victory was a pyrrhic one, for on the eve of his entering camp he issued a press statement alleging that he was being "railroaded" and his case was "discrimination and victimisation". For this breach he was summarily dismissed by the Government. He stood against the Prime Minister in the next general election, was unsuccessful after one of the most bitter campaigns and was shortly afterwards discharged from the Air Force, whereupon he left New Zealand and took up residence in Australia and is engaged in the programme production field. The preceding pages are merely the barest outline of a series of sensational events but it is now necessary to return to the main thread of our broadcasting story and the amalgamation of the two services.

With Scrimgeour's departure the Government decided to amalgamate the two Broadcasting Services with results that can be summarised briefly.

The physical amalgamation was quickly and skilfully accomplished by the senior YA executives. Their chief engineer stripped



the commercial head office recording studios, transferring the equipment to the National Service. Unlisted telephones installed to aid commercial activity went the same way and some members of the staff were transferred to YA. The ZB station managers and senior executives, who, because of the degree of added responsibility demanded by commercial activity, were receiving higher pay than most of their opposite numbers on YA, were held at these salaries, while the YA officers were increased to their level. Junior executives on the Commercial Division were kept below their YA counterpart so that, as some learned to their cost later, the YA man could claim that magic word in the public service—"seniority".

There was no attempt to alter the basis of ZB programming but there were many irritations which resulted in a gradual loss of morale. A major broadcast assignment would be handled by the National Division, and the ZB stations would be offered a portion of the YA programme. Staff control was centred in YA and applicants for announcing positions on the ZB stations were auditioned, not by a commercial executive who knew the style of announcing necessary for hard-selling commercials, but by the YA plays producer who would test them in the pronunciation of classical and technical musical terms, and the Commercial Division executives were given no say in the selection of their announcers. If there was competition for relay equipment the needs of the National Division were given priority, the ZB stations coming a bad second, while recording equipment was centred in the YA building, and ZB artists had to record under YA control.

The eight years from 1943 saw the YA stations make many advances, while during the same period the ZB stations went into a gradual decline. The National Division broadened its programme structure considerably, the emphasis being not so much on culture as on entertainment, racing, boxing, wrestling, cricket, plays and feature productions. With the elimination of any challenge from its enterprising and imaginative commercial competitor, the field was clear, and YA took full advantage of the position. In the early years of this period with no financial worries its position was supreme, for competition had completely disappeared from the New Zealand radio scene, and zest disappeared from broadcasting. As one critic in 1945 remarked:

"There is a polite and well-bred atmosphere about New Zealand radio that is completely at variance with the national



temperament, and also at variance with the tone of the world in which we live and give battle. It has, in short, an atmosphere of an Edwardian parlour.

"The general picture of any year's programme is always the same. Talks, serials, music and whatnot is loosely described as 'sessions'. It has not varied for years. It is monotonous, and not particularly good. The listener, when he prepares for an evening's listening, never does so with the hope or knowledge that he is going to hear something enlivening or new or challenging. The 'talks' are well vetted. The musical recordings are dully familiar. Most of the serials, even if popular, are not very good, artistically speaking. Many of the regular 'sessions' could do with a shot in the arm, or an infusion of plasma. A weariness seems to have settled down on many announcers and 'personalities', and originality and enthusiasm are either discouraged, or are unavailable, which is hard to believe."

A weariness was certainly apparent for the service lacked drive, imagination and ideas, while on the administrative side it was often stifled by direct ministerial interference. Broadcasting continued its role of a political Aunt Sally . . . newspapers regarded attacks on broadcasting as "good copy" and some really extraordinary proposals received press coverage. In 1946 a youth was found in possession of a sub-machine gun and a probation officer in Christchurch considered he was influenced by the radio serials, a theory which started a number of resolutions from educational bodies. In the same year the Canterbury Education Board requested the elimination of all programmes unsuitable for children and made a general criticism of programmes broadcast in the early evening. The Director in his reply made this point:

"It is a pity rather that radio critics in general are apt to direct attention to the less desirable type of programme while completely ignoring the many good things which are available to listeners . . . the service endeavours to cater for a wide variety of tastes and it is only by a careful perusal of public programmes that selective listening is possible. . . ."

Strangely enough, many of these attacks were directed against the YA stations though the Commercial Division was not destined to remain out of the news for long. In May 1946 the



advertising manager Mr. Stewart Duff resigned, due to dissatisfaction with the management of commercial broadcasting, and the resignation received a great deal of press publicity. Here is an extract from the Wellington *Dominion* (May 8, 1946):

"Leading national advertisers, and members of the commercial radio staffs, report that there is general concern over the system of management under which Professor James Shelley directs commercial radio as an adjunct to his duties at the head of the National Broadcasting Service.

"They claim that Professor Shelley is not a business man, and that his interests lie primarily with the national service. Under the present system, without adequate direction commercial radio is drifting, they say, and while staff and advertisers are dissatisfied there can be no proper service to the listening public. . . ."

The Association of New Zealand Advertisers urged that the Government should investigate the control of broadcasting, suggesting that the commercial stations be administered under a business manager. Nothing was done.

### *The National Orchestra*

While the Commercial Division strained at its bonds, the National Division made a notable contribution to the cultural life of the community by the inauguration (in 1946) of a National Orchestra, but as with most major broadcasting appointments, the position of conductor evoked a great deal of bitterness. The controversy dated from 1940, when Anderson Tyrer formed and conducted the Centennial Orchestra which was intended to form the nucleus of a national orchestra had not the war intervened. The scheme was pigeon-holed, then revived in 1946, when Prime Minister Fraser wished to have the orchestra functioning before the general election to be held later in the year. There was no time to call applications for the post of conductor, and in any case it was always tacitly understood that Tyrer would get the post. Opposition was promptly forthcoming from some musical groups, and from a section in Parliament. With a battle brewing, Fraser cabled Sir Thomas Beecham for an opinion on Tyrer, the reply allegedly reading: "I could not think of a more suitable man to conduct your national orchestra." This recommendation in no way stifled the criticism, which was in evidence until Tyrer resigned his post and left



New Zealand some years later. Some musical societies had the temerity to suggest that the control of the National Orchestra should not be vested in the Broadcasting Service although, of course, they expected the service to meet all expenses.

The first concert of the National Orchestra was a gala affair with the Prime Minister, Members of Cabinet, and diplomatic representatives present, and all apparently well pleased with the result. One Minister even whispered in awed tones: "This is the birth of a nation." Press reports were in the main quite laudatory but the two jarring exceptions were in the columns of the *Southern Cross* which was the official organ of the Government party, and the *Listener*, which occupied a similar relationship to the Broadcasting Service. To say there was some trouble would be an understatement, particularly when it was found that the critics in both cases had been actively campaigning against the appointment of Tyrer. That the criticisms were not appreciated was evident by the quantity of mail that poured into both journals, and as both were open to a ministerial squeezing it is not surprising that neither sinned again, all further concerts being favourably reported. The advent of the National Orchestra meant the importation of supporting artists and tours by leading New Zealand performers, this in turn requiring an organisation to handle the many intricate administrative problems. It was obvious that the post of concert manager called for an entrepreneur of standing and experience, but no one was really surprised when a comparatively junior officer from the YA programme department, with absolutely no previous experience in this field, was appointed and when he moved on he was replaced by an accountant with even less experience.

The exploitation of the orchestra and travelling artists was obviously a field where the Commercial Division executives and organisation could be of considerable assistance, but not until orchestral finances became strained were these specialists called in even to write copy for press advertisements and posters. Early publicity, printing and advertising were handled by a YA programme officer, with sometimes surprising results. In the case of one Christchurch concert all the posters and programmes arrived in the city the day after the concert had been held, and it was commercial station 3ZB who rushed around preparing stencilled programme sheets to cover the emergency. The Commercial Division also provided many hundreds of pounds of free publicity for the concerts but it could not obtain complimentary



tickets to enable some of the leading advertisers to attend as guests. Later the Commercial Division did play a part in handling the advertising, but for some reason known only to the Director it was the accountant on each station who was given the responsibility, although it soon became obvious that the advertising manager was needed to take over certain duties. When orchestral finances became further strained the public noticed that advertising was included in the concert programme. This has been normal business practice for countless years in most concert programmes, even for the most exclusive touring artists, but for some reason the Broadcasting Service had not made this move to obtain extra revenue.

The Concert Section was not fitted to compete with private enterprise in this highly competitive field, and it naturally had more than its share of growing pains. One visiting singer complained bitterly to the press about the lack of publicity, and although some of his statements proved to be incorrect, it did emerge that at one town the posters were too large for the tram boards, and the display cards too small to attract attention. The choice of artists at times left something to be desired: one singer who asked to be billed as a "world famous tenor" and "the world's greatest heroic tenor" did not draw enough patronage to cover the house expenses in one North Island town. However, many first-class artists brought to New Zealand were well supported by a discriminating public. The point is that many of these early mistakes would not have occurred if experienced people had been charged with concert management.

If the formation of a National Orchestra justified the ministerial phrase "birth of a nation" it was obvious that the N.Z.B.S. would be forced to practise birth control lest the arrival of other lusty infants should prove an overwhelming financial burden. The original authority given in 1946 empowered the Director to expend not more than £40,000 in that year. In 1946-7 the cost was £20,000, the next year it rose to £60,000 and in 1948-9 it was £70,000. The total cost in the three years was £150,000 excluding overhead, while concert proceeds for the same period totalled £14,800. However, art has always been an expensive commodity and even these costs have since been exceeded. By 1948-9 the orchestra should have settled down and given some real indication of its worth, while public reaction to concerts would have given certain pressing answers on the financial side, but at this crucial period the orchestra completely lost its identity for a full season. Many members of the orchestra had to spend



some months touring the country providing music for a production of *Carmen*, while the remainder were located in Auckland providing "dinner music" from 1YA. A symphony orchestra playing *Carmen* every night and the balance of the performers providing dinner music—it was ludicrous, but more was to follow.

Towards the end of 1948 rumours were current that the assistant director and the programme officer-cum-concert-manager would visit Australia to conclude a deal with J. C. Williamson to bring the Italian Opera Company to New Zealand, and the National Orchestra would be made available to J. C. Williamson for the tour. The conductor heard the story from a press report and requested clarification, but none was forthcoming. Despite the fact that the reason for the visit was almost public property the Director went to great lengths to disguise the nature of the trip even from some of the senior executives of the service. When the result of the negotiations was announced it was stated that the reason for the concert manager visiting Australia was to enable him to obtain experience in handling the Italian company. However, before the tour eventuated this officer had been transferred and a successor appointed, so he enjoyed an Australian holiday at the expense of the Broadcasting Service.

The conductor was justifiably annoyed about this move because it meant continuous travelling for some months at a period when the gross cost of the orchestra was likely to rise to £100,000—about a ninth of the total year's revenue from the national and commercial divisions combined.

The service had in effect guaranteed J. C. Williamson against any loss on the New Zealand tour but had also agreed to provide the National Orchestra without charge. It was a one-sided arrangement but it did enable the New Zealand public to see the opera company, although their opening performance was roundly criticised by the press. The tour enabled the public to see something of the National Orchestra too, for in some theatres they literally sat with the players who were spread over the front stalls and even spilled into the private boxes in the wings! From an orchestral point of view the venture was ill advised. The tour interrupted the training of the orchestra at a crucial period, and for a whole season the players became a "pit" orchestra, gallivanting around the country as such. There was no need for this spectacle, for the service could have sup-



plied the necessary musicians without having to commandeer the entire symphony orchestra.

The establishing of the National Orchestra was the result of bold and imaginative thinking, but there must be a policy to implement planning and the planners must be able to see the road ahead. The present situation cannot continue and the service will be in serious difficulties if it is forced to maintain the orchestra under the terms of the original commitments.

### *Radio New Zealand*

New Zealand joined the fraternity of international shortwave broadcasters in 1948 many years after most other countries had commenced similar transmissions. Back in 1944 the Canterbury branch of the New Zealand D.X. Club had urged the establishment of a shortwave service, but according to press reports they were informed by the Director that a regular shortwave programme of "one hour would cost £3,000 a year". . . . The service was short of technicians . . . there was a shortage of talent and "copyright responsibilities are too heavy". However, apparently these drawbacks were overcome for Radio New Zealand became a reality four years later, when according to the Prime Minister the station was to present "an accurate picture of life in the Dominion". There was certainly an opportunity for progressive programme planning but it appears that for a period at least the tendency has been to re-broadcast YA programmes, even on occasions some of the commercial programmes without the commercials. It should not be inferred from this that the station does not broadcast interesting material about New Zealand, for some fine programmes are broadcast. However, the conditions under which the station operates hardly flatter the call sign "Radio New Zealand", for it is housed in two back rooms at 38 The Terrace, Wellington, although of course it can originate programmes from other studios.

The apparent weakness of Radio New Zealand lies in its approach to broadcasting, for it is merely an offshoot of YA, possesses no individuality and lacks skilled writers able to interpret the New Zealand scene. It does not even possess a manager and the highest ranking officer has the typically Broadcasting Service title "Supervisor of Programme Organisation—Short-wave Division".

New Zealand has an excellent record in many fields and there is a wealth of material, which, properly presented, would be



of interest to overseas listeners. The emphasis should be on this type of programme and not standard recordings . . . Radio New Zealand should "sell" the country but it must pay suitable writers and at the same time engage skilled personnel, showmen, and artists. It cannot be done from a back room in a YA building while the power of seven and a half Kw. is insufficient for its purpose.

### *The Local Emphasis*

Until 1947 broadcasting in New Zealand had always been considered from a national point of view: high-powered stations in the cities with alternative programmes, and a few stations located in the larger areas outside the four main centres. This was to be changed and it was now proposed to build a chain of low-powered stations in many of the smaller areas. The new policy enunciated in the 1947 Annual Report read:

"It is recognised that social and cultural developments are an essential factor in the successful readjustment of the community to post-war conditions. Creative expression is to a great degree the measure of a nation's stature, and it is considered that broadcasting should contribute to the stimulation of such creative expression, especially, but, of course, not solely, in relation to the musical, literary and dramatic arts. . . .

"So far broadcasting has been considered from a national point of view—that is, providing the best programmes available without much regard to the locality of artists or stations. The time is now opportune for the adoption of a supplementary policy—that of using radio as a local institution to serve as an instrument for developing the cultural life, artistic endeavours, and civic consciousness of towns and districts. The development plans therefore include provision for the establishment of a chain of low-powered local stations throughout the Dominion, outside the chief centres, which will to a considerable degree depend for their appeal upon local interest in the artists and their work, or the local significance of talks or relayed ceremonies. Local talent drawn upon for broadcasts over these stations need not be of as high a standard as is expected from the more powerful stations, so that a wider range of artists may be afforded the opportunity of being heard. It is hoped by this means to provide a stimulus to the



various grades of talent, and help to foster choral, instrumental, and dramatic work throughout the community.

"It is anticipated that local studios will become centres of artistic activity and bring the officers of the Broadcasting Service into touch with all the talent of the country. . . .

"These 'local' stations will be regarded definitely as serving the community interests of the immediate surroundings and will work as closely as possible with local organisations. They will act as extensions of town hall, concert chamber, and schoolroom, while retaining their own status as providers of entertainment and instruction."

There is one ominous remark in that statement:

"... local talent drawn upon for broadcasts over these stations need not be of as high a standard as is expected from the more powerful stations. . . ."

From the very earliest days of broadcasting some administrators have held the idea that the New Zealand public is simply dying to hear local talent on the air and that the main purpose of broadcasting is to cater for this alleged talent. This is a fallacy nurtured by editors and leader writers and a few of the artists who wish to be "discovered". There are very few aspects of broadcasting upon which I would be dogmatic but this is one of them. The listeners buy their radio sets to be informed and entertained, and when it comes to entertainment they want the best. If Gracie Fields can sing "Ave Maria" more appealingly than the young lady in the next street then the public want Gracie. New Zealand is a small community and can never become self-sufficient in entertainment—the public know this and the practical broadcasters know it also. The views often expressed to the contrary read well in the newspapers and sound well from the lips of politicians but it simply is not broadcasting. If you doubt these words check on any one day's programme from the X-class stations (as these local stations are termed) to see what proportion of the programme is presented by local artists. There can only be one rule in broadcasting—the listeners require the highest standard be it in dramatic work or crooning, and they make no allowance for the home-grown product.

The X-class station is merely another broadcasting unit providing a local coverage but handling features and recordings



heard on the main national and commercial stations. They certainly have not served "as an instrument for developing the cultural life, artistic endeavour and civic consciousness of the respective towns and districts" nor have they helped to "foster choral, instrumental and dramatic work throughout the country", for the simple reason that the product does not exist in sufficient quantity to occupy any fixed amount of time on a local radio station. Obviously the authorities now realise these hopes can never be achieved, for each year sees an increase in transmitting time devoted to the broadcast of sponsored programmes because, no doubt, the National Division needs the money.

The X-class station structure is imposing an additional strain on the broadcasting service, which appears to grow like Topsy. There does not appear to be any master blueprint, nor has one ever existed to my knowledge. Stations are added, additional services are given and every now and again a new emphasis is apparent, but still no sign of an overall plan. What is required in these X-station areas is a series of regional stations taking certain national programmes on relay from the cities, devoting limited periods to local programming, recorded or otherwise. The great weakness in New Zealand at present is the lack of relay lines to carry music, and if the Post and Telegraph Department would provide these, listeners would benefit far more than from the erection of many local stations each duplicating administration and staff requirements, each playing, packing and distributing the same features and recordings, and sorting the same sessions that are already being handled on twenty-eight stations. New Zealand has a population of approximately two millions and is served by twenty-eight broadcasting stations, each originating and duplicating programmes. It seems an expensive method. A survey of Australia would soon enable any investigator to see how the same result can be achieved considerably cheaper and more effectively by the use of relay lines . . . but the Broadcasting Service should control the lines. New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world which does not possess these all important facilities, and their provision should be given the utmost priority.

This should not be construed as an attack upon the X-class stations. They are desirable and now well established, but by the provision of relay lines they could serve their communities more effectively, their administrative overhead could be materi-



ally reduced, and this in itself would have a marked effect on the balance sheet position at the end of the year.

The overall lack of planning on the part of the service is very apparent in connection with these stations. For instance, about the time they were organised the main city stations (including the commercials) increased their power, some of them up to 10 Kw., enabling them to broadcast over a wider area than previously, and in practice resulting in an overlap into the local X-station area. The confusion was particularly noticeable in programmes. There is no limitless amount of suitable programme material, particularly feature productions, with the result that listeners in the outlying areas might follow a series on a main city station and then find they were expected to listen to the same programmes from the local stations.

It is obvious that insufficient thought was given to the initial planning of this local station activity, this applying particularly in the case of Wanganui, where the station was commissioned and expected to attract advertising revenue while the service at the same time increased the power of the adjoining stations in Palmerston North and Wellington. In effect this destroyed part of Wanganui's potential audience. However, once a station commences transmission no one would dare suggest closing it down, for such a step would involve a Government decision, and the slightest suggestion of such a move would result in terrific pressure on the politicians.

All existing stations are here to stay, but by the provision of landlines equipped to handle music, many simultaneous broadcasts could take place, with considerable saving in overhead administration and overlapping. The N.Z.B.S. has indicated that the equipment has been on order with the Post and Telegraph Department, and one line in the North Island may be available this year. Most countries have these facilities, and many New Zealand broadcasting problems could be overcome if a serious attempt were made to secure the necessary equipment throughout the country.

### *The Results of Amalgamation*

I have stressed that one main weakness of New Zealand broadcasting lies in its lack of an overall design for progress and administration. The foundation was laid in 1937, with two networks separately controlled, both serving the listeners and both answerable to the Minister of Broadcasting. This was destroyed



in 1943 when the two services were "amalgamated", and the move resulted in the gradual deterioration of the Commercial Broadcasting Service, with the Commercial Division to-day lacking drive, incentive and direction. It has a monopoly and still enjoys the patronage of a large section of listeners, so that its future as a profit-earning appendage of YA is secure, but its individuality has been submerged.

The ZB executives were reduced to the role of "hewers of wood and drawers of water". In pre-amalgamation days the ZB stations were pulsating and alive, they captured the imagination of listeners who previously had no experience in this new approach to radio. The administrators injected a real spirit of adventure and entertainment into radio, and there was always something doing. In the few years of separate administration the commercial stations concentrated on live shows—the Weintraubs were brought to New Zealand, and later an Australian orchestra—a singer—Fred and Maggie, the popular radio characters—all providing stimulating radio shows for the listeners. Senior executives visited other countries in search of new ideas and techniques. To-day this lively approach no longer exists, the ZB stations merely being revenue-earners grinding out features and recordings. Since the amalgamation no ZB executive has been sent overseas, not even to attend the Australian Commercial Stations' Annual Conference, where mutual problems were being discussed.

It was a case of the mighty falling very fast, for at one time the ZB stations almost threatened to submerge the YA stations in popular appeal. The amalgamation removed this threat, enabling the YA administration to hold its competitor in check while at the same time taking many of its techniques. The ZB stations are only a shadow of their former selves, having the appearance of being slowly strangled by tight administration; their head office does not even possess a business letterhead, but uses the YA stationery with the commercial postal information *typed* in.

Since the amalgamation, the Commercial Division has not been permitted to import any radio personality or artist to New Zealand, despite the fact that it would be the advertisers' money meeting the costs. When one national advertiser secured the services of Gracie Fields for a personal appearance on ZB stations, he was informed that unless the artist broadcast simultaneously on the YA stations there would be no broadcast at all, yet when YA imported artists the ZB stations were excluded from their performance, although at the same time the commercial stations



were used extensively to carry free announcements for their YA appearances. It may be asked why the advertisers tolerate such a state of affairs, and although the answer is well known in commercial circles it may also be of interest to the reader.

The ZB stations are carrying their full capacity of sponsored programmes, and there is a waiting list of firms anxious to secure favoured times on the air. In the past, some of these firms have resented the fact that major advertisers with foresight in the early days, quick to see the opportunities air advertising could give, bought up the choice programme times and have remained on these channels ever since. It is a fact that national contracts are seldom cancelled. On occasion, certain business interests have suggested that these big sponsors should be compelled to surrender some of their channels to enable a re-allocation of time to satisfy those firms who have been waiting for years. If the service agreed to this move, they would offend the large advertisers (who would lose their times), but the action would be applauded by the people replacing them. For that reason the major advertisers are the prisoners of the Broadcasting Service and must keep "on side" with the policy makers, for under monopoly there is no alternative, no competition.

The advertising eggs are in one basket, and the advertisers and agencies well know that future success depends upon maintaining friendly relations with those controlling the air channels . . . humiliations just have to be accepted, and they must resign themselves to the fact that the ZB stations, built with their money, can when required be used by the YA stations to publicise programmes broadcast in opposition to their sponsored shows. The advertiser is powerless, receives no rebates and has no rights in the matter.

The Years of the Locust indeed.

## II

### *Ministerial Control*

No ONE can accuse the two political parties of being frightened to experiment with the control of broadcasting. During the last two decades both have opposed the principle of a public utility being privately owned, but from then onwards there has always been a sharp cleavage. The National Party and its predecessors while in opposition favoured Corporation control with a degree of independence, but past difficulties of unenlightened personnel, hampered by part time contact with a widely ramified service, gave scant promise of satisfactory results.

The Labour Party on the other hand opposed the policy of delegating the control of broadcasting to any outside body, and throughout the years contended that the microphone was too potent an instrument to be entrusted to private hands.

Over a period of ten years we experimented with private control, Board control, and since 1936, ministerial control.

From 1936 to 1943 New Zealanders were served by two networks of non-commercial and commercial stations, under separate heads, and each with a different function to perform. During these years we possessed, not a copy of the British, American, or Australian systems, but a coverage that was applicable to New Zealand conditions. In short we had a New Zealand system of broadcasting that appeared responsive to democratic influences.

While Savage was able to devote time to the portfolio the system worked well. He had complete confidence in the ability of his Departmental Heads, Shelley and Scrimgeour, to control their respective networks, and he was content to leave all administration matters to them. He was pleasant to work with and accepted recommendations on their face value. He detested red tape, expected that departmental recommendations should be concise, and once the fundamental points had been explained, his "Approved M.J.S." would usually follow.

The cares of office and the advent of war in 1939 did not enable the Prime Minister to devote much time to broadcasting, and Postmaster-General Frederick Jones took over its adminis-



tration. Jones was a different type altogether. He was cautious, and out of his depth in handling broadcasting, the opposite of Savage in almost every respect. Where Savage had confidence in his officers, Jones was suspicious.

Jones had two periods of office, being relieved by David Wilson, and assuming the portfolio again when that gentleman became New Zealand High Commissioner in Canada.

David Wilson was the third Minister of Broadcasting. He rose to power as secretary of the Labour Party, and although not a member of Parliament, he was ambitious and keen, and after his appointment to the Legislative Council he eagerly accepted the Broadcasting portfolio when it was offered. Like Jones, I doubt whether he ever realised the necessity for overall planning, nor had either man to my knowledge shown any awareness of this important aspect. During these years there was no plan for the development of New Zealand broadcasting. Wilson revelled in day to day administrative matters, and the problems that had to go to the Minister for approval were obviously the very stuff of life to him. He would examine each proposal very carefully, have it explained in detail, cross-examine the Departmental Head, and frequently hold it for further consideration.

The fact that his relations with Scrimgeour were so strained made him lean more to the National Service and Shelley, whom he liked. He did institute one very good arrangement whereby he saw the Director of the National Service each Monday morning, and this must have been of considerable benefit both to the Minister and Shelley, for it enabled them to obtain an understanding of each other's problems.

One adverse result of ministerial control was to project broadcasting into the political arena, its operations becoming a football to be kicked around by both parties and their adherents outside the House. Whatever happened, broadcasting was caught between these two forces, and the staff and listeners suffered accordingly. During the Fraser regime, the executive had to remain "on side" with the Government Party and none could afford to be on friendly terms with any members of the Opposition. Under such a system, administered as it was during these years, the Broadcasting Department operated from behind a corrugated iron curtain, and while critics of the Government came to regard broadcasting as a tool of Labour policy, sections of the Trade Union movement condemned the department because it did not give greater assistance to the Labour Party.



The executives, who were supposed to be responsible for the day to day administration of the service, were subjected to a withering fire of criticism from both sides, without having any means of defence. They received very little protection from either Jones or Wilson, who did not appear to take any steps to defend the service from some very unfair attacks. I cannot help expressing an opinion that at times both these men acted as though their sole purpose was to defend the party, and broadcasting stewardship was frequently obscured so that this end could be achieved. They had no training in administration, and they seemed incapable, or unwilling, to defend their department. When the Trade Union or the Annual Conference of the Labour Party decried broadcasting or were critical of some aspect of its administration, the Minister, instead of defending the department, was almost sympathetic with its critics, and I have no recollection of either of these gentlemen assuming responsibility for situations which they had created, and which their own supporters were criticising.

Wilson had more ability than Jones, but this merely made him more dangerous when the interests of listeners clashed with political expediency, for the listeners always came a poor second. I am not attacking the principle of ministerial control, for that is a matter of Government policy, but I am suggesting that it places a great strain on the human factor, and in this period neither of the two men possessed either the desire or the ability to rise above the circumstances. On occasions the department was used as an instrument, not of Government policy, but of party policy, and problems were frequently viewed in the light of political advantage. This inevitably resulted in the Minister interfering in the normal administrative matters and programme structure of the department, and there were occasions when the Minister usurped the rights of the Director.

On one occasion a typist invoked the aid of three Ministers of the Crown to upset a decision of the station manager supported by the Director of Broadcasting—and succeeded.

There were many other incidents involving ministerial dictation that were aired in the press. For instance, *Freedom* (December 5, 1945) complained that a Trade Union leader F. P. Walsh had access to the 2ZB microphone for two periods during peak night listening hours to whip up enthusiasm for a demonstration connected with the tenth anniversary of the Labour Government. The paper continued:



"It would be interesting to know what the response would be if the National Party, say, applied for time on 2ZB at the best time of the day, to boost some National Party gathering. Would the Farmers' Union be permitted to put up speakers to organise a demonstration against the abolition of the country quota?"

Two years later when the Trade Union movement was involved in internecine strife, the Government backed one side, directing that a national network of stations should broadcast a statement from the Federation of Labour, but that no statement from the other side in the dispute should be broadcast. In a press statement on January 11, 1947 the secretary of the aggrieved party said:

"We do not object to the Federation of Labour enjoying an opportunity to put a statement over the air because we have supported claims which the Trade Union movement has been making for a long time now for space on the broadcasting networks. The Union is naturally astonished however when it is not allowed the right of reply which is surely a privilege we can expect in a democratic country. . . ."

During the years the National Party was in opposition, their speakers complained that the commercial stations each week broadcast announcements advertising the *Standard*, which was the official organ of the Labour Party, and that when they wished to buy time and publicise their journal, *Freedom*, they met with censorship. *Freedom* objected that a publicly owned instrument of public intelligence should be subject to political censorship, particularly for paid broadcast advertising. In the same issue the paper drew attention to other instances when they claimed the Government censored scripts that contained any criticism direct or implied of any Government action or policy, and yet broadcast announcements favourable to itself or attacking the Opposition. However it was at election time that this alleged political use of broadcast facilities came under intense fire.

The Government had permitted a certain number of political speakers from the National and Labour Parties to broadcast, but instructed that on the night before the election only the Government case would be broadcast. This was a gross abuse of ministerial powers and contrary to all principles of fair play. Indicative of press comment was an editorial in the *Christchurch Press* (November 24, 1949):



"... The present Government has done this sort of thing before; but it is obviously getting bolder—or very desperate—with each successive election. Clearly its members see nothing wrong in using public funds to keep themselves in power. In Parliament and outside, they have defended the right to discriminate against their opponents in the use of publicly owned broadcasting facilities. Electors would be wise to reflect that their unfair discrimination in broadcasting rights is not such a very long step to denying the Opposition any broadcasting rights whatever."

Actually these remarks were not out of place, for the Democratic Labour Party who placed fifty-two candidates in the field were permitted only one broadcast. Throughout the Fraser administration the Prime Minister reserved the final night for use by his own party. In defending this procedure the Hon. Mr. Nordmeyer, Minister for Health, said:

"It was desirable in the national interest that the Prime Minister should reply to the extravagant statements so often made by the Leader of the Opposition."

This political use of the Broadcasting Service received some publicity overseas, for an American newspaper in a leading article wrote:

"The circumstances show how liberty is menaced by Government censorship and control of radio facilities . . . in the light of these conditions it is absurd to say that New Zealand is a free country or a democracy by any of the definitions of this much abused word. . . ."

The position was not quite so bad as the American newspaper would indicate, but the Government's action did arouse considerable doubt in the minds of some people.

Many illustrations could be given: Mr. Fraser instructed that only the "yes" campaign in the Conscription Referendum was to be publicised on the air and under no circumstances was any time to be made available to the "no" case. After pressure he finally agreed to one talk being given for the "no" case, but Fraser nominated the speaker.

These and other incidents, fully reviewed at the time, are quoted to show how impossible it was for the Broadcasting Service to appear impartial while it was subject to this form of



direct political control. As David McCulloch, the B.B.C. broadcaster, says in his book *Question Mark* which dealt in part with New Zealand broadcasting:

"It is virtually impossible to have freedom of discussion if a Minister is going to accept responsibility for every phrase—and every joke—in every programme."

The Labour administration was defeated in November 1949, and the incoming National Party Government appointed F. W. Doidge as Minister of Broadcasting. Doidge was certainly cast in a different mould from his two predecessors, being a distinguished journalist, and for many years a senior executive in the employ of Lord Beaverbrook. He was alert and from the outset gave the impression that he intended to take an intelligent interest in the portfolio. In his first message to listeners he agreed with the contention that broadcasting had not followed any immediately defined group of objectives, but he hoped to secure "a healthy animation of the air" and desired the Broadcasting Service to "adventure and experiment freely and boldly". As the *Auckland Star* (December 21, 1949) remarked:

"The statement is full of promise for the future and suggests that in Mr. Doidge New Zealand radio may at last have found the policy maker it has so sorely lacked in the past."

It did appear that the new Minister possessed a refreshing awareness of his responsibilities, for in his first meeting with executives, he gave evidence of a grasp of facts and figures that surprised most of them. He criticised the "universality" of programmes, and requested immediate action towards some method of zoning the various programmes, so that a discriminating listener could select a programme that suited the particular desire of the moment. By April 1950 the new programme plan was in operation in Auckland, where the YC station, instead of being a subsidiary to the YA station, was now given equal status so that it could programme alternative entertainment and give listeners a choice. This plan had been talked about for years but nothing was done until Doidge's driving force finally had it accomplished in three months. The Minister's argument was that the main YA stations did not plan for the discriminating listener, and "there are times when every station seems to be given over to the one type of programme and times when the listener's choice is limited to an irritating sameness".



The scheme was extended to the other capital cities yet it lacked completeness, due to the desire of certain stations to retain ideas that they felt had been associated with the station in the past.

The next move from Doidge was to examine the position relating to the broadcasts of race results. Practically every station on the air was interrupting its programme to broadcast racing information on Saturday afternoon, and the Minister requested the Director to reduce this needless duplication and confine racing information to one station in each city. Like the zoning of programmes this was not tackled courageously, due to certain departmental decisions regarding racing commentaries and the desire of stations to retain certain programmes. As a result there is still considerable room for improvements in this field.

These plans should have been effected by the Broadcasting Service itself in the years past, but as they were not, the Minister stepped in and directed a certain line of action which undoubtedly had the endorsement of listeners. It appeared that a ministerial new deal was due, and at last the department was to have a man who took an intelligent interest in the overall organisation. Unfortunately the Minister had other important portfolios which took him abroad, with the result that he was able to devote increasingly less time to broadcasting and again the service became a leaderless legion insofar as inter-departmental negotiations were concerned. Then came Doidge's appointment as New Zealand High Commissioner in London and his replacement by Professor Algie. At the time of writing (1953) Professor Algie has not been in office long enough to arouse any comment, but it is to be hoped that he will retain some of the enthusiasm of his immediate predecessor.

There is no denying that ministerial control often implies political control and actions of individual Ministers have in the past openly violated public service procedure. Fortunately the abuse of power by ministerial office holders has been sporadic, but when the tendency exists, the Director becomes the unwilling tool of the party rather than the executive who implements State policy. We have seen how a Minister can use the Broadcasting Service for political ends, and where by interfering in administrative and programming policy, can say this person may broadcast but that person may not. When a Minister interferes to that extent, then the Director is the holder of an empty title and his actual authority becomes a matter for mere academic discussion. Real power rests with the Minister who can decide



policy and then control the administrative processes, but in such a way that the Director, who must protect the Minister, is left responsible for decisions which were forced upon him in the first place. He has no redress and no protection, for his appointment is for three-yearly periods, *renewable on the recommendation of the Minister*. Under these circumstances what Director will run the risk of being regarded as "difficult" by his political masters? The Minister has dictatorial power and can secure his will merely by exerting pressure on a subordinate officer who is in no position to refuse a "request" from his Minister. The danger is the greater when you have a ministerial rabbit who is subjected to pressure from his own party. When a Minister can emasculate a programme for political ends but leaves the Director to face press attacks on the erroneous grounds that he ordered the deletions, then the Minister is not only lacking in intestinal fortitude, but is not safeguarding the listeners' interests.

I am not suggesting that ministerial control inevitably results in a plot to control broadcasting, nor am I suggesting that the Director of Broadcasting becomes a supine tool of the political machine, but both are well aware of the implications. It is not political censure, but the threat of censure, that will dictate departmental policy in certain circumstances. Whenever the Minister feels inclined he can take the wheel and the Director becomes the navigating officer who steers a course laid out for him. There is no limitation of ministerial authority: he is at liberty to regulate the administrative process of the Broadcasting Department to suit himself and the interests of his party. If he wishes, he does not even have to accept responsibility for his actions, but can leave the Director open to attack. In case anyone thinks this is an exaggeration, let me state that this has actually happened. The Minister possesses absolute power, and it is scant comfort for the listeners to know that we have had "good" Ministers as well as "bad" Ministers, for no doubt their intentions were quite good. They always are.

I wonder if we will ever see the day when the Labour Party accuses the Broadcasting Service of a National Party bias, and at the same time the National Party will complain that the news and talks have a left-wing appeal? This sort of criticism is frequently levelled at the B.B.C., but you could not expect this under ministerial control. The Opposition may suffer from alleged abuses, but never the Government.

Broadcasting in New Zealand has been the centre of bitter controversy, and when all criticisms of even minor aspects of admin-



istration can be taken to the Minister's office, he naturally desires to retain a tight grip on the service, inclining towards decisions which should normally be handled by the Director and his executives. Under these circumstances would it not be easy for a politically minded Minister to ensure that any activity of the N.Z.B.S. should not be an embarrassment to the Government in office? When this has occurred in the past, all matters having the remotest connection with politics were referred to him, and it is only natural that he would find it easier to say "no" than "yes" to a policy which might provide ammunition for a critical minority or his political opponents in Parliament. The difficulty of course is that the Minister will always remain a politician, his motto must be "never offend a listener—he may vote for us one day". That is the great weakness of ministerial control of this vital medium. The Minister is too vulnerable and susceptible to the wiles of pressure groups large and small, and broadcasting thus thrown into the political arena is cuffed and belted by the Opposition, not because they wish to criticise broadcasting, but because it is a convenient avenue in which to embarrass the Government. In other words broadcasting is like the innocent bystander in Chicago who always gets shot in the leg when there is a gun fight.

No Government, once it lays its hand on broadcasting, ever wants to let it go. Labour made no bones about its intention of using radio, but the National Party while in opposition deplored State control and advocated Commission control. Yet now that they are the Government, they apparently find no fault with ministerial control; or is it a case of criticising ministerial control when it is the other fellow doing the administering?

There can be no doubt that under this form of control the broadcasting executive has to tread warily, for he knows the Opposition will be the Government one day, and so he progresses supporting the Government and giving the least possible offence to the Opposition—unless the interests of the Government are involved. Whichever way it goes therefore, the Government cannot lose. But the point is, can the listeners win?

The Director's task is not so much to please the customers as to please the Minister—in short just carry on, but do not under any circumstances do anything of a controversial nature. Do not adventure or experiment, but rather continue to tread the paths of broadcasting orthodoxy then all will be well. Is it good broadcasting? Who wants to know? If the Minister is content that is all that matters.



No, it is not good enough. The Minister's first duty is to support the interests of the Government, while the Broadcasting Service should be striving to serve all listeners in some degree. Under ministerial control it must serve the interests of the Government first, and if its loyalty to political leaders clashes with listener interest—as it can with controversial programmes—then political expediency will always triumph over the requirements of listeners. The tragedy is that the listeners will never know when their interests are tampered with because in most cases the story will remain a departmental secret.

*We Can't Let You Broadcast That*

A WRITER has stated that censorship of the air constitutes the greatest threat to democracy since the days before Magna Carta. It seems unlikely that our early radio administrators intended to weaken the processes of democracy, but it is a fact that controversial broadcasting was handled somewhat timidly for many years, and even to-day the approach to this subject still leaves considerable room for improvement.

The Reform administration under the Rt. Hon. W. F. Massey, in drafting the first radio regulations in 1923, prohibited the broadcasting of any controversial material. No one objected to the clause at the time, for radio was merely a new medium providing a few hours' entertainment of recordings and local artists, but the retention of the ban indicated the narrow lines upon which Governments intended developing our broadcasting service, regarding it as a medium of entertainment with little thought to its educative or informative potentialities. It is true that the Government was not being urged on by the public who, in 1925 and the following years, appeared to be but slightly interested in the topic. The Parliamentary Labour Party first raised the issue and then only in terms of using the microphone for political discussion. The broadcasting of a few election results in 1922 was merely a novelty, but when the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. J. G. Coates, broadcast thanks for his return to office in the 1925 elections, it was another matter altogether. The Labour Party realised the Government now controlled a very powerful medium, and fears were expressed that if the occasion demanded political use might be made of the microphone, particularly when it was remembered that the 1925 regulations gave the Government power to insist on all stations carrying their announcements free of charge.

Another election was due in 1928 and in August 1927 Mr. P. Fraser (Labour, Wellington Central), requested that the leaders of each party should be permitted to broadcast political speeches prior to the election—and used the Post and Telegraph Department's annual report to Parliament to bring the issue



before the House and public. During the debate the Government was urged to indicate its attitude, and later the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. H. E. Holland, sought an assurance that radio would not be used in the interests of the Government Party alone. Hansard reported him as saying that it would be "altogether stupid" for anyone to stipulate that political speeches should not be broadcast. The Labour Party again claimed that nationalisation of the radio was the only method of control that would guarantee fair play to all concerned, the Prime Minister replying that, under nationalisation, the Government would have to censor all broadcasts or accept the responsibility for all material used. He added, "If we could arrive at some formula whereby some plain statement of policy . . . could be sent out from each of the parties in the House through the microphone, no doubt it would be effective and probably useful but the moment it comes to controversial questions . . . then it is going to be never ending."

The problems were more imaginary than real for Great Britain, the United States of America, and Australia did not find any difficulty at all, and politicians in these countries used the microphone to address the public on political issues. The New Zealand Prime Minister cautiously suggested that perhaps arrangements could be made for the Leader of the Opposition and himself to speak on the radio for fifteen minutes *without touching on politics*. This suggestion did not appear to arouse enthusiasm in any quarter and the 1928 election passed with the microphone still protected from political battling.

The public remained apathetic. It was considered quite revolutionary, for instance, when on March 11, 1931, the speech from the throne delivered by the Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe, was read from 2YA one hour after it had been delivered in Parliament. Reporting this, the *Radio Record* (March 20, 1931) ventured to prophesy that the microphone would ultimately be permitted at the actual opening of Parliament itself!

By now, the effects of the world depression were discernible in New Zealand and social problems increased in importance. A section of listeners, and some leading educationalists, who were now conscious that new problems would have to be faced, advocated the elimination of restrictions on controversial broadcasts. Early in 1931 a representative deputation waited on the Postmaster-General, Hon. J. B. Donald, requesting definition of the phrase "propaganda of a controversial nature" appearing in the radio regulations. The strict application of this regulation



meant that only innocuous material could be included in any broadcast, and no debates on any topics containing the stuff of life could ever reach the listening audience. Speakers maintained that the ban on controversial broadcasts operated against public interest, and recommended that debates should be permitted. A Mr. E. K. Cook stated that the W.E.A. had been refused permission to take part in debates on educational and economic topics and that the ban meant that practically all educational subjects were prohibited. Mr. H. R. Bannister, of the Victorian University Debating Society, instanced the refusal of the New Zealand Broadcasting Company to permit a debate on the hire purchase system, and that even a subject such as "Is Democracy a Failure?" was not permitted.

The Minister expressed surprise that the regulations were being administered in such a harsh manner—and suggested that the Broadcasting Company was sheltering behind the Government. This was hardly fair to the Company, for they had to obey the Government regulations which were quite specific, allowing no grounds for any liberal interpretation.

At this stage, it is interesting to note that the New Zealand Broadcasting Company during its last few months of existence completed arrangements to broadcast debates on such subjects as "That Unemployment is Due to Private Capitalism", "That the Samoan Mandate Should be Surrendered", "That the Russian Revolution has Justified Itself", "That Capital Punishment Should be Abolished", "That Total Disarmament for New Zealand Would be a Wise Policy". Some of these debates were actually broadcast but, when the New Zealand Broadcasting Board assumed control, the arrangements were cancelled and the regulations were again rigidly enforced.

While the Board controlled the service, the handling of controversial broadcasts was anything but satisfactory, for the Government decided that the responsibility for policing the regulations should be shared with the Post and Telegraph Department and in the case of the B stations, it was not unknown for a local radio inspector to order a B station off the air if he considered an item controversial.

By 1931 the listeners entered the fray, claiming that this "no controversy" ban was an insult to the intelligence of New Zealanders, for it inferred that their mentality was so inferior to that of other people that they were not capable of assimilating facts, testing them, and arriving at a logical conclusion for themselves. It was realised that complete freedom of the air could



not be construed as freedom for any crank to demand facilities; but undoubtedly the difficulties were frequently exaggerated by the authorities. The Government was reminded of the story of Whistler rebuking a conventional critic who delivered judgment on "good" and "bad" paintings. Whistler remonstrated and said, "Do not say 'This is good and that is bad' when you mean 'I don't like this and I do like that.'" Critics of the Government complained that local officials were in effect saying that what they did not like listeners had no right to appreciate, and this was regarded as an intolerable piece of presumption.

The Government would not budge and each year brought forth a number of incidents. Station 1ZM Manurewa had been broadcasting a series of talks by the Auckland branch of the British-Israel Association, but in September 1934 they were prohibited by the Post and Telegraph Department. The ire of the listeners was directed at the Government, for it was claimed the ban discriminated in the religious field. The Minister overruled the Department and reinstated the broadcasts.

One other instance involved Professor W. A. Sewell and Mr. H. D. Dickinson, both of Auckland University. Sewell was to talk on "Religion and Philosophy as Manifestations of Western Civilisation" and Dickinson on "Marxism and the Ideal Equality". Both talks were banned as controversial. On being interviewed, Sewell said, "It seems to me that the policy of the Broadcasting Board is to protect the tender minded." Dickinson was unable to discover from the Board just what they objected to in his proposed talk and suggested, "The Board is unable to differentiate between a statement of views held by a party or school, and an advocacy of those views."

Krishnamurti, who visited New Zealand in 1934, was also invited to broadcast from a B station, but the local radio inspector demanded a script in advance and forwarded it to the Minister, who banned the talk. As the text of the address was not made public, one is unable to say whether it was any more controversial than the church service broadcast each Sunday.

George Bernard Shaw was another visitor who embarrassed the Government considerably when he visited this country shortly after the Krishnamurti affair. Shaw was forthright in his condemnation, stating that the incident was a disgrace and an insult to one who had broadcast in many countries without incurring the disfavour of anyone.

To coincide with Shaw's visit, the Christchurch B station 3ZM completed arrangements to broadcast extracts from Shaw's works



and in particular *Androcles and the Lion*, but the local radio inspector banned the broadcast as controversial. In the resulting hubbub the Prime Minister acknowledged that the Government had tried to keep broadcasting in New Zealand clear of controversial matter, which he considered distasteful to listeners. Then came the announcement from the Broadcasting Board that they had completed arrangements for Shaw to broadcast two talks from the national stations. On neither occasion did Shaw submit a script. Both addresses were not only highly controversial, but on occasions positively blistering and, needless to say, greatly enjoyed by New Zealand listeners.

These incidents brought the whole question of controversial broadcasting into its true perspective, and the Government finally realised they were out of touch with public opinion. The Postmaster-General admitted that a fresh approach was necessary and stated that the Broadcasting Board would be given more control. The *Radio Record* (February 15, 1935) welcomed the proposals:

"The *Radio Record* has always been firmly of the opinion that the sooner the ban on controversy was lifted the better for listeners and the future of broadcasting in New Zealand. The Broadcasting Board has done excellent work when one considers the regulations that have beset its activities on every side, but it has been unable to bring before the microphone many eminent men whose views were likely to bring the Board into conflict with the regulations governing controversy. Now, however, while its responsibilities are to be increased, the Broadcasting Board is to have placed in its hands a power that will bring added usefulness and prestige to New Zealand Broadcasting."

However, when the Government introduced the Broadcasting Amendment Bill in March 1935, it was seen that the ban on controversial matter would not be entirely removed, but that all programme questions would be placed in the hands of the Broadcasting Board to "act with judgment".

Discussing the responsibilities of the Broadcasting Board, in the light of the new regulations the *Christchurch Press* had this to say:

"The Board has it in its power to do an incalculable amount of good in shaping an enlightened public opinion; all that is needed is the proper recognition of this broad truth and a



balanced judgment in the arrangement of programmes and in the choice of speakers to give suitable talks. There is a world of difference between presenting a one-sided case coloured by prejudice, and presenting one in which every aspect is taken into account. So long as the Board is required to exclude controversial subjects defined as such within rigid and narrow limits from its programmes, just so long will radio be denied an opportunity to play the important part it should play in educating the people on political and social problems of the day. . . . It is clear that the B.B.C. has now come to a full realisation of the essential fact that it is not necessarily the subject, but the treatment of it that may be objectionable. When such enlightenment is revealed in our own Broadcasting Act and the Regulations made under it, and the administration of them, broadcasting in New Zealand will begin to take its rightful place in the life of the community."

It was obvious that the Government was handling a problem with tongs. The Bill pleased no one and was vigorously opposed in Parliament. Mr. Savage claimed that the Government was "arming the Board with the authority to muzzle one of the greatest means of publicity in modern times". In the committee stages, Mr. Stallworthy unsuccessfully sought to introduce an amendment giving a direction to the Broadcasting Board to "provide opportunity for the broadcasting of all sides of controversial subjects, political and otherwise".

The Bill came into force the following month, the Postmaster-General stating that if there were any serious objection to the manner in which the Board was operating, the matter could be raised in Parliament and dealt with there.

Meanwhile the Broadcasting Board commenced administering the Act and in April 1935 notified the B stations:

"... that candidates for political honours at the next general election are not to be permitted to broadcast from any station in any capacity after 30th June, 1935. An exception may be made in the case of a person holding the position of Mayor, provided that he speaks in his mayoral capacity, and does not deal with politics. . . ."

It was indicated there would be no exceptions to this instruction, but shortly afterwards both the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance broadcast on their return from Great Britain.

In reviewing incidents in this period, it should be remembered



that the country was still in the throes of the depression and public opinion was flowing against the Government and the Broadcasting Board. A group of Auckland clergymen sponsored a huge public meeting in the Auckland Town Hall on September 24, 1935, and according to their advertisement they were to "make a plea for social justice" and "reply to the Hon. Minister of Employment, Mr. S. G. Smith". 1ZB wished to broadcast the meeting, but the Board imposed conditions which precluded a broadcast. The station manager stated that if the meeting had been called to discuss the care of animals no objection would have been taken, but because they were to deal with the welfare of human beings, impossible conditions were imposed.

The Opposition lost no opportunity of criticising the Government for what was rightly termed a timid and vacillating policy towards broadcasting. Mr. Savage repeated his determination to provide an alternative means of publicity if the people returned Labour at the election. With regard to political broadcasts, Hon. Mr. Hamilton restated the Government's view that the decision rested with the Broadcasting Board; if they decided that members of Parliament were not to broadcast, that was the end of the matter as far as the Government was concerned. I understand that the Board did make some suggestions that certain policy statements could be broadcast from some of the national stations, but the two major parties were not responsive to the conditions.

It was considered a foregone conclusion that with the advent of Labour to the treasury benches in 1935 the ban on controversial matter would be removed. In effect the ban was removed, but with the exception of the parliamentary broadcasts, organised controversial broadcasting as such simply did not eventuate.

When the Labour Government dismissed the Broadcasting Board, appointed a Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, amended the Act to permit controversial discussion, and instituted radio advertising, its opponents claimed that Labour intended to use the microphone for political purposes. In the parliamentary debates of 1936 this contention was vigorously denied and the deputy leader of the Government, Hon. Mr. Fraser, said "The Labour Government is introducing this Bill to make the discussion of controversial matters, political or otherwise, over the air as fair, impartial, and informative as possible, so that people can form intelligent opinions." The ban on controversial matter was repealed but the Government now pretended that controversy did not exist. Of course, ministerial excursions to the



microphone were fairly numerous, but the Government denied that this was using the air for political purposes—they were merely using the most modern means of keeping the public informed! However, the Opposition also claimed the right to “inform” the people and here was the rub. The Government could use the radio whenever it pleased, but the Opposition only when the Government pleased. Prime Minister Savage made no bones about his position or the Government’s motives. In 1939 he stated that he would say enough over the air in fifteen minutes to keep the daily newspaper editors writing for a week. Professor Algie alleged that “The broadcasting policy of the Government has been born in anger and nourished upon prejudice.” He claimed that the Labour Party had eagerly sought in the radio system a means of propaganda with which to oppose the newspapers of the Dominion, and to build up the influence of the party.

When in opposition, Labour was loud in its advocacy for controversial broadcasting, but during fourteen years in office it accomplished little—in thirteen years it failed to provide any real stimulating discussion on social, economic, and political questions, and made little attempt to encourage listeners to think about such matters.

In 1947 a storm broke around the Broadcast to Schools session, and even to-day leading educationalists become very heated at the mention of the series “How Things Began”.

This series was aired on the B.B.C. and was designed “to satisfy the curiosity of children about the early stages of life on earth and the story of man”. The talks were accepted by the New Zealand Broadcast to Schools Advisory Committee, who broadcast nine without comment, but the remaining talks were suddenly terminated by the Minister.

It appeared that the Minister of Education had taken the step on the grounds that the talks presented too materialistic a picture of the universe, but the decision was made without reference to his advisors, the Director of Broadcasting, or the Broadcast to Schools Committee. The public controversy that followed was bitter. The Educational Institute, spokesmen of primary and secondary schools, training colleges and universities—all protested, and finally petitioned Parliament asking that the Education Committee of the House of Representatives hear evidence on the reasons leading to the suspension. The committee naturally supported the Government, although it was



admitted that the members did not hear the broadcast recording or read the script.

No indication was given of the influence used to secure the banning of a series of talks that had been approved by the Minister in the first place, and had the endorsement of the B.B.C., leading British educationalists and religious groups; but the Prime Minister did say that the Minister of Education had his attention drawn to the broadcasts "by a fundamentalist". Apparently this was sufficient. Commenting, the *Christchurch Press* (November 4, 1947) wrote:

"It seems therefore that a jolt from a fundamentalist, no doubt representing the views of other fundamentalists, was sufficient to move Mr. Mason to try, condemn, and execute the series, against all the evidence in favour of it. He had been responsible for accepting it—on the advice of his experts; he now takes 'full responsibility' for rejecting it—on whose advice? Mr. Mason did not say. But the gap in his statement is hard to account for at all, if it does not mean that he consulted his departmental advisors and that he cancelled the series against their advice. As he was quite entitled to do. But a Minister of Education exalts his personal responsibility to a dangerous height if on a question of educational right or wrong, he over-rules his experts, reverses an earlier confident decision, discounts the breadth and substance of the evidence which approves that earlier decision, ignores the want of correspondingly broad and substantial evidence against it, and does all this on the strength of a personal opinion worried out in response to the clamour of an intolerant section. If that is what Mr. Mason did—and that is what it looks like—the conclusion is that he had full political authority to compromise the intellectual standards his department exists to defend."

During the "Aid to Britain" campaign, speakers representing pastoral and other interests were asked to broadcast a series of talks to their section of the community. A Mr. D. G. Gordon of Taihape submitted his script, but because the service made several deletions he refused to broadcast. According to the *Southland Daily News* (February 25, 1948), one deleted paragraph read "If farmers give way at this time to the popular urge of minimum work for maximum pay no doubt they will have an easier time, but in the meantime Britain may starve and the moral force that this country needs to put it on the right lines will be disrupted."



The *Southland Daily News* stated this paragraph would not have been deleted by any newspaper in New Zealand, and suggested that the incident indicated that the Broadcasting Service would not allow any expression of opinion contrary to that which served the Government of the day.

The same year saw the Commercial Division introduce a new type of audience participation session entitled "Citizens' Forum" designed to air controversial topics, in which speakers representing the two sides of a discussion would state their case in a public hall and would then submit themselves to cross-examination from the audience. The session established a following very quickly. The Minister, Hon. Frederick Jones, insisting that he approve all the subjects beforehand, refused permission for many suggested topics (including Rongotai Airport in Wellington, which was arousing considerable interest at the time). The Minister's supervision ensured that no subject distasteful to the Government would be broadcast. The session suffered further ministerial interference when Trade Union groups requested the right to have their speakers take part in the discussions, and Jones instructed accordingly. This had its amusing side when, in the case of Dunedin, one of the Trade Union speakers selected was viewed unfavourably by Prime Minister Fraser, so a direction was given to "keep him off".

The Labour Government was defeated in November 1949 and still the question of controversial broadcasting remains undefined. The national stations broadcast some excellent sessions, some of which could be termed controversial but dealing in the main with international affairs. The commercial stations are making no contribution. Maybe the new Minister has given the Director of Broadcasting all the authority necessary to proceed, but if so no publicity has been given to the decision.

The Government, after all, only placed restrictions on the press to prevent the printing of obscene material or articles calculated to cause a breach of the peace, the press being just as free as it cares to be on any subject. Why not broadcasting?

Other countries seem to manage. For instance the Communications Act which governs broadcasting in the United States, has this clause concerning Government censorship:

"Nothing in this Act shall be understood or construed to give the Commission [the American governing body] the power of censorship over the radio communications or signals transmitted by any radio station, and no regulations or condi-



tions shall be promulgated or fixed by the Commission which shall interfere with the right of free speech by means of radio communication."

The American stations are free to broadcast what they please. In the publication *Broadcasting in the Public Interest* issued by the National Broadcasting Company of America, we read:

"A speaker having been granted time on the air, the National Broadcasting Company does not censor or edit his opinions. It must, however, check for violations of the law and for libellous, slanderous, or seditious statements, as the courts have held broadcasters responsible for any damaging statements made over their facilities!"

This system certainly appears to be working in the U.S.A., Britain and other countries. The radio executive, like the politicians, must follow the public trend, and the radio executive has only to think of radio reaction, whereas the politician has many fronts to defend. Thus, in deciding whether a certain subject should be discussed over the air, the latter can be easily governed by issues of self interest, expediency, or timidity. Our New Zealand radio should be an instrument for enlightenment of an educated democracy, and as such should be free to discuss any subject.

Let the Director of Broadcasting be held answerable for his stewardship, and in this way will radio serve the nation without fear or favour, regardless of the narrow requirements of class or party, for the virility of any broadcasting service can be gauged from its attitude to programmes, talks and discussions of a controversial nature.

No New Zealand Government should have anything to fear from encouraging controversial broadcasts. It may be stated that the Minister does not censor radio material, but in practice he does, and on occasions the broadcasting executive can be likened to the boy picking strawberries. "Pick as many as you want," said the farmer, "but remember I shall be watching you from the window."



*Publicising the Programme*

ANY INDIVIDUAL or organisation whose future is dependent on public acceptance of a product must devote time and energy to making the community conscious of the wares, be they soap or broadcasting programmes. Advertising and publicity spring from healthy competition, and although this is absent from New Zealand broadcasting it is still necessary to inform listeners of the programmes offering from the various stations.

How has this been handled?

The first step in organised broadcast publicity was taken in 1924 when the *New Zealand Radio Record* was established by Arthur Heighway, a very astute journalist who realised that if he could secure the monopolistic right to publish programme information, he would soon become a power in the publishing world. The Broadcasting Company, still feeling its way, welcomed Heighway and his journal, willingly granting a monopoly of programme information, and in return secured editorial support for its policies. The agreement suited both parties.

When the Broadcasting Board assumed control of the service the position was somewhat different, for broadcasting was established and the Board was a semi-Government body handling public funds. Some surprise was occasioned when it was learned that the Board had continued the monopoly and in effect levied a toll of 17/4 per annum on every listener who desired to know what items of entertainment were to be broadcast during the current week. Apparently this was just a friendly arrangement, because no publicity was given until *Truth*, as a service to its readers, requested permission to publish details of the weekly programmes. The Board referred the request to the *Radio Record*, which promptly refused permission. This paper then appealed to the Minister, who declined to alter the arrangement, and the monopoly continued until the *New Zealand Listener*, owned by the Broadcasting Service, in turn assumed the monopolistic right to the information, and drove the *Radio Record* from the field.



All this happened some years ago, but the monopoly persists even though it is now kept within the family circle.

What are the implications?

In the days of Company control the agreement with the *Radio Record* could be defended. As there was no regular channel of publicity the alternative would have involved the Company in a publishing venture likely to prove somewhat expensive, so it was in their interests to encourage Heighway.

With the Broadcasting Board the situation was different and many people were of the opinion that the Board had no right to traffic in this information.

The programmes were compiled for the listeners, at their expense. Yet the *Radio Record*, which contributed nothing to broadcasting, was permitted to corner the programmes and sell the information to the public.

Imagine the Railway Department announcing that all information concerning the departure of trains would be given to one newspaper which the travelling public would have to purchase! Yet the Broadcasting Board did just that, and to a lesser extent the arrangement applies to-day with the *New Zealand Listener*.

It has been stated that arrangements of this nature cannot be in the interests of listeners, for if a journal is given these exclusive rights it means that no other radio journal can function, and those giving the monopoly receive in return editorial support and protection from criticism. In the Company days the *Radio Record* was a staunch supporter of private enterprise, its policy opposing any semblance of State control. When the Broadcasting Board assumed control and was in a position to dispense favours, the *Radio Record* trimmed its sails to suit the prevailing winds, by becoming an ardent advocate for Corporation control; then when the Labour Government completed its nationalisation of broadcasting, the *Record* suddenly discovered hitherto unknown virtues associated with State control, and valiantly supported these views until the journal was forced out of business by the *New Zealand Listener*.

Throughout its career the *Radio Record* frequently denied adequate publicity to public opinion and reduced the outlet for public criticism to a minimum—an inevitable outcome of any such arrangement.

Here is an example.

During the Broadcasting Board's regime there was a weekly journal called *National Opinion* which at one stage published a series of illuminating articles on broadcasting control. *National*



*Opinion* bought advertising space in the *Record*, but its copy contained the words: "Interesting and critical articles at present appearing on broadcasting in New Zealand . . ."

The *Record* rejected the advertisement, but although pressed would give no satisfactory explanation. The reason was obvious, and in the next issue of *National Opinion*, we read:

"We believe our articles presented issues which are of vital interest to the public, and can naturally assume the *Radio Record* refused acceptance of the advertisement owing to its connection with the Board. The *Radio Record* is under an obligation to the Board for the right to publish programmes in advance, and it now appears to us the journal is more concerned in not giving offence to the Board than in championing the cause of broadcasting."

The sands were running out for the *Radio Record* when Labour became the Government in 1935, for in the past the *Record* had attacked Labour radio policies and the journal now found it had no friends in Government circles. Furthermore the Broadcasting Service intended to operate its own journal and the *New Zealand Listener* entered the field with a monopoly right previously enjoyed by the *Radio Record*. It was obvious that the loss of programme rights would put the *Radio Record* out of business and the public now had the stimulating experience of seeing this dying journal suddenly embarking on an intensive campaign against monopoly of programme publication, in which the virtues of yesterday became the sins of to-day. This favour that the *Radio Record* had enjoyed for more than ten years now became an evil thing when it was in the hands of another journal.

In the resultant scuffle two or three interesting facts came to light. It appeared that the Broadcasting Company had subsidised the *Radio Record* to the extent of £50 per week, but the Broadcasting Board now reduced this to £10 per week, then eliminated the payment altogether.

With the advent of the *Listener*, the *Radio Record* went to the wall quickly, events proving conclusively that the public bought the journal for programme information and not literary content.

Finally the Broadcasting Service bought out the *Radio Record*, more as a gesture than anything else, for a sum of approximately £3,000, a clause in the agreement requiring that, beyond a brief



announcement in the final issue, no publicity was to be given to the purchase.

The *Radio Record* died quietly.

The monopoly of programme listings was now transferred to the *New Zealand Listener*. Newspapers were permitted to publish a single day's programme if they desired, but no advance programme information was to be included. For the first few years the *Listener* gave adequate publicity to both national and commercial programmes, then a gradual change in the earlier format radically altered the nature of the journal.

The first editor was an experienced journalist of the old school, possibly more interested in good prose than broadcasting or programme information; a dominating personality who sometimes acted as though he knew what was good for the listeners.

With the war came a shortage of newsprint, which reduced the space devoted to programme publicity material as separate from programme listings. By this time the amalgamation of the two services had been accomplished and the Commercial Division was no longer in a position to insist on its share of editorial support. Shelley rarely interfered, so the editor became a "State within a State" answerable in effect to no one and pleasing himself what he published. Thus the magazine slowly but surely lost its identity as the official organ of the Broadcasting Service, becoming instead a literary journal possessing a very strong appeal for the small but vocal section of the cultural community. It published short stories and articles of little general interest, and rarely did a feature story appear on any aspect of broadcasting. Senior executives of both divisions protested to Shelley but without avail, and the editor went merrily on his inky way until the point was reached when even the listing of the programmes was condensed and pushed to the back page of the journal to allow the lay-out of articles (having nothing to do with broadcasting) to be prominently featured. By now the literary staff of the *Listener* dominated the senior executives of both divisions, and on occasions the journal refused to publish programme material on the grounds that it was "unworthy". It was difficult to subscribe to the belief that the editor was some species of Sacred Cow who could wander through the Temple at will. It was pointed out that the *Listener* was deciding what was good programming. The journal was now apparently supreme, able to satisfy its literary ambition, knowing that its monopolistic right of programme listing would give it a guaranteed circulation. The Broadcasting Service became subservient



to the *Listener*, rather than that journal serving the Broadcasting Service needs.

This was a personal triumph for Oliver Duff who throughout his term as editor remained a "strong man" who would brook no interference. His staff was loyal, as well they might be, for he supported them at all times, but they did not break many lances in the cause of broadcasting.

Duff's complete independence from broadcasting control did not mature until after the amalgamation of the National and Commercial services, but with this event (or because of it) the worthy editor emerged as monarch of all he surveyed. He and his competent scribes appeared to despise commercial broadcasting as pandering to the depraved tastes of the masses—it was made quite obvious that they regarded it as a Bad Thing.

The Commercial Division was frequently discriminated against on the grounds that many of the programmes were not in the class that the *Listener* cared to publicise, while those programmes with a trade name in the title were refused listing altogether. Thus we had the Broadcasting Service taking money from the advertisers and then allowing the editor of its journal to refuse necessary publicity.

The first editor was quite openly antagonistic to commercial broadcasting, and made no secret of his personal dislike for the programmes. Not only did the *Listener* fail to give editorial support, but it encouraged critics to attack and decry the programmes—it even paid them to do so. The *Listener* would appoint correspondents in various areas and pay them for each paragraph used. Many of these people were openly anti-commercial and revelled in the opportunity this afforded them to attack their particular dislikes. Yet permission and space to reply to these attacks was denied. Thus the service was faced with the position of taking the advertisers' money for a programme, and then witnessing another section of the service paying money to reduce its potential audience.

No one feared fair and accurate criticism but most of the criticism was neither fair nor accurate.

The *Listener* could with impunity criticise the efforts of the programme executives and could refuse to publish certain programme information, but it had to use restraint and tread warily where ministerial corns might be concerned. During the 1946 election campaign this journal was in the market for election advertising. The National Party bought space throughout the country to publicise its radio policy and wished to take a full



page with the *Listener*, the advertisement to include the words: "Political propaganda to cease—no more political appointments." The *Listener* jibbed, stating that to accept the advertisement would be a tacit admission that certain undemocratic practices existed. As the spokesman for the National Party summed it up—it meant that an advertisement in the *Listener* could not say what could be said by any party against the other in the columns of the daily press.

Relations between the *Listener* and the Commercial Division were continually strained during the last years of Duff's editorship. All new and unusual programmes were listed in a special column "Things to Come" but Duff and later the new editor, Holcroft, flatly refused to list any ZB programmes in this column.

When Duff retired and Holcroft was appointed editor it was quickly obvious there was no brave new world in store for the Commercial Division.

He quickly realised his power, defended his ground with the tenacity of a terrier, and the policy of the *Listener* remained as before.

There are two problems, one for the Government and the other for the Director, and the first is concerned with the long-standing question of monopoly.

When the *Listener* made a profit on the year's working, Duff claimed that the journal was purchased for its literary standards, and that even without the programme information the circulation would still remain one of the highest in New Zealand. This has always been disputed by many broadcasting executives who claimed that without the monopoly of programme listings the *Listener* would go the way of the *Radio Record*.

Is it in the best interests of listeners that the programme information should remain a monopoly, or should any journal prepared to give service to the public be permitted to publish the information? There are arguments for and against but if the monopoly was discontinued the public would undoubtedly gain—but the N.Z.B.S. would be faced with certain problems for the *Listener* would be forced to compete with other weekly journals, and its success would depend upon public acceptance of its product. Maybe that is not such a doubtful measuring stick either.

If on the other hand the *Listener* is to be protected and this monopoly continued, then it must render a real service to the public, and to the N.Z.B.S. It should revert to its original role



as a broadcasting journal first; this should override literary aspirations that appeal to a limited section of the potential radio audience.

As the official organ of the N.Z.B.S. the *Listener* should surely publicise programme news for all sections of the public, not merely those which the editor considers "worthy" or in keeping with the intellectual standards of his literary staff. If the *Listener* file were examined over the years it would clearly show the radical changes that have been made at the expense of the Broadcasting Service as a whole, and the Commercial Division in particular.

If the authorities plan to have the *Listener* develop into a literary journal, then it should do so against normal business competition. The former editor maintained that the *Listener* is purchased more for its literary pages than its programme listings, and if this is really believed then a good case can be stated for ending the long standing programme monopoly, by permitting any weekly journal to print the programmes as a service to their readers. The alternative is for the *Listener* to revert to its original role. There is much in broadcasting that needs to be publicised, and which should be given preference over the many obscure and sometimes rather precious essays occupying full page space in various issues.

*What of the Future ?*

IN THE first chapter I suggested that the N.Z.B.S. had performed its tasks reasonably well within the limits of its shifting target but subsequent chapters would indicate that the listeners are entitled to greater efficiency and better broadcasting.

How can this be accomplished?

*Systems of Control*

It is obvious that irrespective of the political philosophy of any Government, the State will always retain an interest in the broadcasting system, but it is a matter of opinion whether this interest should be complete nationalisation as practised in New Zealand to-day, or whether better results would be achieved through a partnership of State and private enterprise as is the case in Australia, or the Corporation control of the B.B.C.

Taking the alternatives first, not in any great detail, but merely in outline:

*State and Private Enterprise*

If we were to adopt the Australian system the State would remain licensing authority through a Broadcasting Control Board acting as a radio policeman, issuing licences, controlling frequency allocations, power of stations, and able to discipline any licensee who breaks the regulations. Each station would submit annual reports giving full details of financial returns, programme allocations, listing public service programmes, and service rendered during the year. The Control Board would have competent staff carrying out regular station inspections in the same manner that Government Audit polices local authorities.

The Broadcasting Control Board would operate under statutory authority and would report to Parliament each year, but in day to day activities it would be supreme and not in any way subject to political control. Members of the Board would be three in number with, say, two of them possessing practical radio experience. Operation of the Board would be a charge on



the broadcasting industry and paid proportionately by State and private interests, which would comprise:

- (a) A YA network of non-advertising stations operated and controlled by a New Zealand Broadcasting Board of three members who, provided they met the requirements of their licence, would be in complete control of the YA network, appointment of staff, working conditions, salary and superannuation, and would be independent of the present Public Service Commission control.
- (b) A ZB network comprising commercial stations owned and operated by private enterprise under licence issued by the Control Board. The Board might demand certain conditions affecting staff, superannuation, etc., but in other respects the licensee would be as free in this field as is normal for private enterprise.

It will be obvious that if a broadcasting coverage is to be supplied by the joint efforts of the State and private enterprise, a central authority such as the Broadcasting Control Board would be necessary.

The first task of this body would be to rationalise broadcasting, and by this I mean that private enterprise would have to accept some responsibilities now carried by the N.Z.B.S., and relieve the service of some of its financial responsibilities, at the same time ensuring that the coverage would not be reduced. In this scheme private enterprise could not merely operate a commercial service in the cities but would also be called upon to provide a service in the less profitable outlying areas. If we agree that in the past the N.Z.B.S. has over-expanded and that expansion does not necessarily mean improvement, then the task becomes easier. This expansion, accomplished at heavy cost, has over-committed the service, resulting in twenty-eight stations all originating independent programmes and in many instances duplicating functions.

I suggest that the Broadcasting Control Board should investigate the structure, then after weighing the factors, could allocate some of these stations to the privately owned commercial network, thus maintaining the present local service but without any claim being made on the listeners' funds.

Under such a system the privately owned stations could make a sizable contribution to the solving of the present financial problems besetting the N.Z.B.S., first by taking over some of



their financial responsibilities, and secondly by paying for technical services. Admittedly this second factor is not a satisfactory solution but the technical services of the present sprawling commercial and non-commercial networks have become so interwoven that a clean break might prove embarrassing.

Under such a system a healthy vigorous competition would return to broadcasting, and the Board would ensure that the privately owned commercial stations played their full part in providing the best possible service for listeners. Both the State and private enterprise would have clearly defined spheres of influence and the lightening of the N.Z.B.S. financial burdens should result in the YA stations providing a better and more efficient service than is possible to-day.

### *Commission Control*

This would entail a New Zealand Broadcasting Commission being placed in control of the N.Z.B.S., comprising the YA and ZB networks. The Commission would absorb the powers previously wielded by the Minister and the Public Service Commission, but under this form of control there would, of course, be no need for a Broadcasting Control Board.

When we first experimented with Commission control (i.e. the Broadcasting Board) the results were hardly encouraging; but it was the personnel, not the principle, that failed. Broadcasting is a science, and to entrust the control of such a powerful influence to a grocer, accountant or farmer, none with any experience, was the height of political folly and the results were only to be expected. This point acknowledged, a case can still be stated favouring Commission control for the N.Z.B.S., freely admitting that the State through Parliament must retain ultimate control. The influence of the State, however, would only be exercised in matters of broad policy for there would be no place for a continuing day to day guidance of the service by any Cabinet Minister. The Commission, responsible for the operation of the N.Z.B.S., should enjoy complete liberty of action and not be subject to the ministerial direction that would apply to a State Department. The day to day administration of the service would still rest with the Director of Broadcasting, who would be responsible to the Commission in the same way that he is now answerable to the Minister. Always providing that competent people comprised the Commission, we would by this means free broadcasting from any political influence; and its



administrators would be able to develop the service along the lines of independent responsibility while still permitting Parliament to hold a watching brief as applies with the B.B.C. in Great Britain.

This method of control would also eliminate the Public Service Commission (P.S.C.) from the broadcasting field. In the past the P.S.C. governed staff salary and grading, but this would be taken over by the Broadcasting Commission. Thus, from the outset the Broadcasting Service would be entirely governed from within by people familiar with its problems and responsibilities, and would surely function efficiently on an equal basis with other media of entertainment, publicity, and enlightenment. It should always be remembered that broadcasting personnel—comprising producers, actors, announcers, technicians, panel operators, programme directors, etc.—are specialists, who cannot be satisfactorily classified by the P.S.C. under the conditions of employment and remuneration planned originally in terms of office workers only. The heavy administrative hand of the P.S.C. in this all-important field has robbed the service of many specialists who have been forced to go overseas for advancement and recognition. Under Broadcasting Commission control, the Commissioners would be free to correctly evaluate the services of its experts without endeavouring to compare their responsibilities with a lawyer in the Public Trust Office or a clerk in the Lands Department.

If it was decided that the N.Z.B.S. should be thus controlled, the Broadcasting Commission would still be expected to rationalise the Service, allocating coverage functions to both YA and ZB, and it would be inevitable that the ZB network would take over added responsibility with the X-class stations, thus relieving the National Division of some financial obligations. I shall not elaborate this point any further because the purpose of the chapter is merely to suggest alternative methods of control and not present any detailed blueprint.

### *Ministerial Control*

The remaining alternative would be to retain complete nationalisation under ministerial control; but with this decision the inevitable task becomes that of providing suitable flexibility and adaptability within the service, combined with real and unhampering contact with the people's representatives in Parliament.



If this system remains then it is to be hoped that the authorities will examine the broadcasting structure with a view to correcting the obvious weaknesses that exist to-day.

It is absurd that the N.Z.B.S continues to spend many thousands of pounds on programmes and yet makes no attempt to ascertain listener requirements. Surely this state of affairs bears all the hall-marks of an unhealthy monopoly and the lack of incentive that springs from competition. Broadcasters all over the world possess an accurate measuring rod indicating listener patronage but in New Zealand we lack tangible evidence of public reaction to programmes. In the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia listener research and surveys are regarded as indispensable tools in the creation of programmes which possess the maximum appeal for listeners in the various categories.

Why not New Zealand?

There can be no dispute about our news service or rather what passes for news with the N.Z.B.S. As I stated earlier, the news broadcasts are, with one possible exception, the worst in the English speaking world. The obvious solution would be an agreement between the New Zealand Broadcasting Service and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, with plenty of examples overseas to prove the value of press-radio co-operation. For instance in Canada (unless there has been any change recently) the press interests make their news facilities available to the State-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation without charge, provided, of course, that the C.B.C. acknowledges the source of all news broadcasts in their sessions. Similarly in Australia most of the commercial stations have an agreement with the various metropolitan newspapers who provide a radio news room in their building, the personnel thus obtaining a copy of all overseas and internal news which comes through on the modern teleprinter machines. The Australian network with which I am associated operates this type of agreement, and broadcasts four news sessions daily to a country network of sixteen stations.

Stations and networks throughout the Commonwealth and the United States make similar arrangements for broadcasting news, the association of radio and newspaper working for the benefit of all concerned. I doubt whether the average newspaper is really happy about the intrusion of broadcasting into the news sphere but press interests in most countries realise that broadcasting is here to stay and act on the assumption that they might just as well derive some benefit from a mutual assistance pact.



I suggest the N.Z.B.S. approach the N.P.A. and seek their co-operation. As news sessions could be a source of revenue the service should be designed for presentation over the national or commercial network originating from Wellington, which would be the only centre with a fully staffed news room. At the conclusion of the national news each station would break the relay and broadcast a local weather report which would be followed by local news items made available by the city newspaper and credited as such. The actual wording of credits would be a matter for discussion between the N.Z.B.S. and the N.P.A. and although by far the greater proportion of news would be handled on relay from Wellington, individual credits from stations could go to the local news source in each case. The greater proportion of news costs could be a charge on the Commercial Division, leaving the YA stations to find a relatively small sum although they would receive exactly the same service as broadcast by the ZB network, excluding the commercial announcements. In New Zealand no broadcast advertising is permitted on Sundays and certain holidays, meaning that some fifty-five days in each year are non-revenue producing, otherwise the Commercial Division could possibly carry the whole cost of the news service and supply it to the YA stations without any charge at all.

The alternative would be for the N.Z.B.S. to obtain a service from an overseas news agency. This would not prove as expensive as would appear on the surface, because again the information would be channelled through a central source in Wellington and subsequent broadcasts would radiate from that city. The news agency would agree to provide a certain number of words at certain times each day; the N.Z.B.S. would merely complete the sessions from the material supplied.

It certainly would be preferable for the N.Z.B.S. to reach agreement with the N.P.A., but the approach should be made by the Broadcasting Service. As we have already seen, the press have not been particularly helpful to broadcasting since it became a State Department, but they might agree to co-operate, particularly if requested by a National Party Government. This sort of agreement has been readily acceptable to radio and press interests overseas, and it is possible that the press would rather conclude an agreement than see the N.Z.B.S. set up its own news section independent of the press, which might well prove an embarrassment to the N.P.A. There is no real press competition in New Zealand, the papers' treatment of news from overseas



sources being such that seldom is speedy action needed to secure a beat. There is certainly no incentive for the Broadcasting Service to set up its own facilities because this will involve them in expenditure, so that it is in the interests of both parties to reach a satisfactory basis of agreement.

Surely it is worth an effort.

### *The "New Zealand Listener"*

I would like to refer again to the *New Zealand Listener*. I do suggest that the public are entitled to complete information on the administration of this section of N.Z.B.S. activity and the Annual Report is the vehicle that should be used. The public should be informed on such things as the cost of printing the journal, amount of revenue from advertising, revenue from subscribers, audited circulation for the year, distribution costs, and maybe the amount of free advertising secured on the YA and ZB stations which in addition to its programme information monopoly, gives the journal an even greater advantage over other publications.

I am of the opinion that with all its advantages the *Listener* should be able to return substantial profits on each year's working, and it could do so provided the authorities will ensure that the journal meets the requirements of the broadcasting public and does not cater for a small academic minority.

### *The National Orchestra*

The N.Z.B.S. cannot continue financing the National Orchestra on the original basis of taking culture to the people, travelling to the smaller cities and towns that would otherwise never receive the personal association and stimulation to be gained from a symphony orchestra, and provide school concerts and radio programmes in the centres.

Should *all* this be paid for by the Broadcasting Service? Should not the Government, local bodies and possibly musical societies be prepared to make some contribution? One of the leading symphony orchestras in Australia is the Sydney Symphony, which is financed by grants from the State, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the City Council, and I suggest that some similar method of financing our own National Orchestra could be found. After all, the Government should be interested in improving cultural tastes in the community, and in addition, why should not a local municipal authority be asked to con-



tribute towards the cost involved in travelling a symphony orchestra to a particular town? Perhaps we could enrol the moral support of musical and civic groups throughout New Zealand to assist in publicising concerts and selling block tickets in their districts. By this means the orchestra would in effect become a national institution, and people in all walks of life would be more closely associated with its work and welfare than they are to-day. In other words, the people would be helping themselves, instead of asking listeners in Invercargill to pay for the cost of a concert in Hamilton. As the Minister has already indicated, the financial position of the National Division is causing some concern and unless the present high rate of expenditure is curtailed the listener will get less for his money, will be asked to pay a larger licence fee, or the taxpayer through the Consolidated Fund will have to contribute to the entertainment of radio listeners.

It seems unrealistic to compel the N.Z.B.S. to pay the whole cost of the orchestra. I suggest the N.Z.B.S. be *one* of the parties responsible for financing the orchestra, but the contribution made by the Broadcasting Department should take the form of programme fees for services rendered. These would be fairly substantial remembering the costs involved in presenting this type of entertainment.

To sum up—the National Orchestra is the people's orchestra, a community venture that should be the responsibility of the Government, local bodies, musical societies and the public through the box office.

### *Financial Reticence*

Here is a large monopoly concern with an income exceeding £1,000,000 per annum yet the financial information given in the balance sheet is meagre to a degree.

Taking the last balance sheet for 1952 the National Division disposed of £520,099 under the following *two* headings:

Net expenditure on programmes, including payments to artists, broadcasting rights, copyright fees, recorded programmes, relay lines, and sundry miscellaneous items, £125,623.

General administrative and running expenses including rents, rates, and insurance, lighting and heating, legal and audit, printing and stationery, salaries and wages, telephone services, repairs and maintenance of buildings and offices and



studio fittings, operation and maintenance of transmitting equipment, fees for technical trainees, and sundry miscellaneous items, £394,476.

Thus no one is able to analyse the balance sheets or even discuss any aspect of expenditure. It seems surprising that Parliament should be satisfied with such meagre information, particularly as it is the National Division that is unable to live within its income. I am not suggesting that the accountants are anything but competent, but obviously they could provide a great deal of additional information if it was required.

Does the department cost each section of its operation, or when economy has to be practised do they merely issue a ukase that expenditure must be reduced all round by "X" per cent? For instance, take the Production Department. Here the N.Z.B.S. has competent producers and players who are capable of producing good radio drama. There is no indication in the Annual Report or balance sheet to give the slightest suggestion of what this important section costs, or the revenue received from its activities. Since the amalgamation, the Commercial Division Production Unit has been disbanded but it would be interesting to know whether the present Production Department produces plays or serials to suit commercial sponsorship so that they can be used on both YA and ZB, in the latter case earning revenue, and thus reducing the number of serials or plays that have to be imported. Again this section produces a great deal of material for the Broadcasts to Schools sessions. Do the listeners pay for these or is there some refund from the Education Department? Are individual plays and serials costed and the playings set off against the original cost? Obviously a section balance sheet would indicate whether the Production Department is operating satisfactorily or not.

A further point. Why lump all the items together in the balance sheet? Why not give the maximum information to the people, who, after all, are shareholders entitled to information on how their money is spent? The listeners might well ask for considerably more information than the department is at present giving. For example, what sum each year is paid to New Zealand artists? How much does the department pay to other Government departments for services rendered in the national interest? If landlines are necessary to carry important Government announcements does the Post Office make these lines available "in the national interest" or do the listeners have to pay full com-



mercial rates? Why shouldn't the people know what the wage bill is each year and why should the department wish to disguise the amount by mixing it up with items such as telephone repairs and audit fees?

Similarly with Radio New Zealand. There is nothing in the balance sheet to show the shortwave service costs to the New Zealand listeners. Surely they are entitled to know, for although it is not a service for local consumption the New Zealand listeners have to foot the bill. It is claimed that Radio New Zealand helps to advertise the country abroad, and if this is so the listeners might well expect the Tourist and Publicity Department to bear some of the costs.

The *New Zealand Listener* does not present a balance sheet at all.

Much of the criticism of this method of setting out the National Division balance sheet applies to the Commercial Division, where the authorities (1952) blithely dispose of £505,417 under two headings:

Net expenditure on programmes, including payments to artists, broadcasting rights, copyright fees, recorded programmes, relay lines, and sundry miscellaneous items, £49,952.

General administrative and running expenses, including rents, rates, and insurances, lighting and heating, legal and audit, printing and stationery, salaries and wages, telephone services, repairs and maintenance of buildings and office and studio fittings, operation and maintenance of transmitting equipment, advertising, commission, and sundry miscellaneous items, £455,465.

The wording of the first item is identical with the first item of the National Division accounts, which is standardisation plus. It is too vague altogether for no one can ascertain how the money is being spent. Surely the listeners and advertisers who pay for the service are entitled to some additional information. Why shouldn't they be informed of the amount the Commercial Division spends on New Zealand artists, and how much they pay other Government Departments; the amount of free service they give them and the value if any of services rendered in return?

Regarding the item "copyright fees", are these paid to the holders of copyright or does the National Division make one

overall payment and then assess the Commercial Division—if so on what proportion of the total charge?

The second item (£455,465) is again identical in wording with the second item in the National Division account except for “fees for technical trainees” read “advertising commission”. What commission does the Commercial Division pay to secure its business, and again why should salaries and wages be mixed up with lighting and heating?

Why should the N.Z.B.S. be so reticent in financial matters? The balance sheets are so presented that it is almost impossible to obtain a clear financial picture, for there is certainly no information to indicate transfer of funds between the National and Commercial Divisions; it is obvious that the amalgamation of the two services must have resulted in a measure of relief for the National Division for certain administrative expenses can now be charged to the Commercial Division. We are not informed of the actual sums, and I suggest that some additional information on this aspect is due to Parliament and listeners so that the real relationship between the two divisions is disclosed.

A detailed analysis on figures can be wearying, but a comparison in the general administrative expenses of the two divisions for 1949 and 1952 produces this result:

*National Division.*

General Administration

1949	..	..	£266,256
1952	..	..	£394,476
			<hr/>
Increase	..		£128,220 or 48%

*Commercial Division.*

General Administration

1949	..	..	£214,828
1952	..	..	£455,465
			<hr/>
			£240,637 or 112%

Taking into account the number of stations attached to the respective divisions it would appear that an explanation for the increase in Commercial Division expenditure is warranted. It is obvious that some adjustment has taken place in the allocation of expenses between the two divisions.



It is essential in any business enterprise that individual sections be costed. The amounts which are transferred from the Commercial to the National Division should bear some relation to actual costing and should not be estimated on the basis of "what the traffic will stand".

I am frankly curious on the financial relationship between the two divisions because I feel that the Commercial Division is making a far greater contribution to the upkeep of the YA stations than listeners realise. The National Division has been hopelessly over-committed, first by the indiscriminate opening of stations, and then by having to find the enormous sums necessary for the upkeep of the National Orchestra. It is natural, therefore, to assume that the Commercial Division will occupy a more important role in helping to finance the N.Z.B.S. After all, the latest balance sheet (1952) provides this information:

Net profit of Commercial Division ..	£95,752	
Less Provision for tax .. .. .	£50,700	
	<hr/>	£45,052
Less		
Loss on National Division .. .. .		£71,288
		<hr/>
Net deficit of New Zealand Broadcasting		
Service for 1952 .. .. .		£26,236
		<hr/>

I am not opposed to the principle that the Commercial Division should contribute funds to the National Division but it should be done openly, and listeners are entitled to know what they get for their money, and what proportion of their entertainment on the national stations is actually paid for by the ZB stations. The attitude of a section of the public towards commercial broadcasting would necessarily change if they realised that without the ZB stations they might have to pay one of the highest licence fees in the world in order to maintain present programmes. The same question may be applied to the X-class stations. What proportion of their total costs of operations is paid for by the Commercial Division, and does it bear relation to the actual hours on which these stations broadcast commercial programmes?

These financial questions are worthy of proper consideration, for the N.Z.B.S. is flirting with the idea of television and has been courageous enough to send two of its engineers overseas



to study the technical aspects of the question. At the moment the service could not possibly afford even a token television service, but within a few years the public will demand what is available to overseas listeners. What then?

Sooner or later the relationship between the National and Commercial Divisions of the N.Z.B.S. will have to be defined. The drift, the covering up of financial transactions between the two, must be clarified. At present there is a suspicion that the Commercial Division is being "milked" to support the National Division finances, thus delaying the day when the actual state of listeners' funds will have to be disclosed. Surely the public have some rights in the matter? Their acceptance of commercial broadcasting has enabled these stations to make large profits but since the amalgamation public criticism of the ZB stations has been very pronounced. Why?

Is it because they are not improving their programmes, but instead are ploughing back some of their large profits into YA programmes? Can anyone recall a single really outstanding programme from the Commercial Division in the last few years? Maybe the answer lies right here—in the lack of finance for proper programme development.

The Commercial Division is earning enormous sums of money, donates many thousands of pounds worth of free advertising to deserving causes, and allows rate concessions to Government Departments. To quote from the 1947 Annual Report:

"It is of interest to note that no reciprocal advantage is gained in return for these concessions, full charges being paid for all services used by the Department."

This one-way traffic applies to the National Division as well, for thousands of pounds are spent on specialised programmes for the Education and Agricultural Departments. In the present financial crisis facing the N.Z.B.S. I suggest a more realistic approach is necessary. Why should listeners have to contribute to the cost of education services? In effect this section of the community pays twice—once in taxes and again through the licence fees. The listeners are also called upon to maintain Radio New Zealand which provides programmes not for themselves but for other countries. The position surely calls for a re-examination of functions.

The National Division has incurred responsibilities, many of them at political instigation prior to 1949, and some undertaken



without due regard for future operations. Now the stage has been reached where the National Division expenditure has outstripped its revenue and will continue in this strain until such time as a complete overall plan of operation is laid down and followed. The position will not be rectified merely by demanding increased tributes from the Commercial Division so that the National Division can live in its accustomed style. There must be planning and method, aimed at providing a permanent remedy for the present difficulties, and only as a last resort should the listener be called upon to pay more.

### *A Stocktaking*

Now that I am approaching the end of my task I would like to make one final plea.

New Zealand should develop its own system of broadcasting—something that will suit New Zealand conditions and serve our people.

Throughout the years the nearest we have been to that ideal was from 1937 to 1943 when we had two broadcasting services competing for listeners. The YA stations with an assured income from listeners were expected to cater for all sections of the audience, while the ZB stations with no fixed income provided the type of programme that appealed to the majority of listeners, their revenue depending on the success achieved. Assuming that New Zealand is committed to a State-operated service, then competition between the two services must make for healthy rivalry, although YA and ZB have differing responsibilities to the public. It was a retrograde step when this was destroyed in 1943, and to-day we have no system or form in the Broadcasting Service and as a result the N.Z.B.S. has reached the crossroads.

The ZB stations are slowly losing favour with the listeners and this is the result of the amalgamation. Restore this network to its original role as equal partner in the New Zealand system of broadcasting, and a monopoly is replaced with healthy competition which must benefit listeners. Advertising revenue is keeping the YA stations on the air and helping to pay for the National Orchestra and other worthwhile programmes. Without commercial revenue, the listeners would have to make a far greater financial contribution than they do to-day.

Let there be no misunderstanding. The Commercial Division can make a greater financial contribution to the YA revenues,



but as an equal partner, the stations returning to their role of popular entertainers. They should plough back some of their profits into their commercial programmes and not merely occupy the role of banker to the National Division. In other words the Commercial Division should be restored to its role in the broadcasting life of New Zealand communities, the Director regarding himself as Director of Broadcasting and not merely Director of the National Division and *Gauleiter* of the Commercial Division.

A degree of executive responsibility should be restored with individual responsibility defined and encouraged. Above all, there should be a commercial manager charged with the overall responsibility for the ZB stations and answerable to the Director of Broadcasting. The present method of control has a Heath Robinson atmosphere. The advertising manager (called Advertising Supervisor) possesses no real power and is supervised by the secretary whose function is staff control.

I am not attacking the N.Z.B.S., but I am suggesting that a great public utility such as broadcasting should on occasions be called upon to give proof that it is serving the best interests of listeners. In other countries, notably Great Britain, Canada, South Africa and Australia, the broadcasting service is continually under scrutiny which is desirable when broadcasting is conducted from the public purse. In supporting this approach Mr. R. J. F. Boyer, Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, takes his stand with these words:

"It is a healthy thing that this [public scrutiny] should be so, as a safeguard against two besetting sins:

1. That a national institution does not become a self-satisfied and entrenched bureaucracy, and
2. That it does not forget the reason for its existence.

"Where we do have to show cause, however, is in being able to demonstrate that we broadcast not only good material but material which the public would not get if we were not in existence. In the last resort it is by this standard that we will always be judged."

I commend that statement to those charged with the administration of our own broadcasting service, and make a plea for the return of a dual system with a reorganisation of functions and



responsibilities that will enable the National Division to meet its commitments and the Commercial Division to develop its individuality. The present monopoly makes the financial return reasonably secure, but it is possible that a continuation of present policy may ultimately kill the goose that laid the golden egg—and the goose in more ways than one is the ZB network.

There is still time.





## Appendix

### *The Jamming of 1ZB*

1ZB AUCKLAND was jammed on the night of November 24, 1935, a few days before the general elections—an incident that was to develop into a radio sensation possibly without parallel in any country.

The final week of the election campaign was a very bitter fight, in which the leaders of the two major parties converged on Auckland for the climax. 1ZB and its director, C. G. Scrimgeour, formed a spearhead of the B station campaign, and rumours were current that the Director intended to throw discretion to the winds in his final pre-election session of the popular "Man in the Street", and urge listeners to vote against the Government. Public opinion was at a peak, and as the hour for the session approached, journalists and the curious public thronged the studios. Came the warning silence signal—then the red light—and the session was on the air. The script, which was afterwards made available to the press, consisted of a plea for tolerance, but shortly after the session commenced "all hell broke loose", to quote one listener. A loud crackling noise completely drowned the station signal, making the session hopelessly inaudible.

A powerful transmitter, tuned to the wave length, had jammed 1ZB.

Public reaction was immediate, hundreds of people flocked to the studios, the phones buzzed continuously, and the Auckland telephone exchange was forced to close the lines to local traffic in an effort to handle the steady stream of long-distance calls coming from all parts of the North Island.

The following morning events moved swiftly. Arrangements were made to have the talk repeated, and although that evening was 1ZB's silent night, the Post and Telegraph Department readily gave the necessary permission for the programme. The afternoon newspapers reported Scrim as saying:

"It is quite evident that the disturbance was caused by an exceedingly powerful transmitter, and in most cases our signals were completely blotted out. We regard it as a most

glaring example of the extent to which some people will go to muzzle free speech. I have had a great number of letters and anonymous messages sent to me from supporters of the Government, who imagine that I have been opposing their interests, and I can only take it that the jam on the air was the climax to the fear that I would use my influence against them. . . .”

When interviewed, the Auckland Radio Inspector stated that an official investigation was being made, as undoubtedly the jamming had been deliberately planned. At this stage the Government was being accused, and that evening's Auckland *Star* carried the following quarter-page advertisement:

#### DISCLAIMER—RADIO INTERFERENCE

The executive of the National Political Federation, for itself and every organisation and individual with which it is associated, disclaims any connection, direct or indirect, with the persons or parties who, on Sunday night, interfered with the Rev. C. G. Scrimgeour's broadcast. Our organisation and our Party stand for principles too high to allow of a resort to any such practices, and we assure the public that anything done to hinder the Rev. C. G. Scrimgeour was done entirely without our knowledge and has our unqualified disapproval.

(Sgd.) G. P. Finlay

Chairman of Executives.

By now, the jamming of 1ZB had become an immediate political issue, discussions in the press and on the hustings indicating the great interest being taken by the public. Government leaders in particular were singled out for vocal attacks at the political meetings, and this prompted the Hon. J. G. Coates to release this statement to the press:

“I have received communications suggesting that the Government are in some way responsible for the interference. These suggestions are quite without foundation. Neither the Government, nor the Post Office, nor the Broadcasting Board had the slightest connection with the occurrence, nor did they have any knowledge of it. The interference is either a childish rag, or an unscrupulous attempt to make political capital by throwing suspicion on the Government. I have already warned



the public against last minute trickery, and would remind them of the forgery of tickets from the recent Town Hall meeting as a further indication of the existence of an organised attempt to adopt unscrupulous tactics. I now repeat this warning. In view of the unfortunate occurrence, arrangements have been made to enable Mr. Scrimgeour to speak over the air to-night, so that the programme which was interfered with may be given. For my part, I can only deplore the whole unfortunate happening, and reiterate my own personal sympathy with the B stations, and my desire to give them every reasonable facility. I regard the B stations as giving a useful service to the public, and providing a valuable stimulus to the national stations. . . .”

Mr. Coates also stated that in the event of the jamming being repeated he would arrange for Mr. Scrimgeour to give his talk from the more powerful 1YA station. The jamming had now become a national matter, and the New Zealand Broadcasting Board issued this statement:

“Veiled insinuations are being made in Auckland that the Board’s stations or apparatus were responsible for the alleged interference with transmission from a B station in Auckland on Sunday night. The suggestions are contemptible. Neither the Board members, nor the staff, have any knowledge of the origin of the disturbance and the accusations seem to be the culmination of a series of mis-statements and unwarranted allegations made in recent months concerning the Board.”

An anonymous phone call to 1ZB suggested that the cause of the interference might be located at the Post and Telegraph workshops at Middleton Road, Remuera, for a powerful transmitter had been delivered there two days before the jamming incident. When a further message gave similar information, Mr. Scrimgeour approached a senior departmental officer, who denied all knowledge of such a transmitter. While this enquiry was being made two members of the 1ZB staff, who surreptitiously investigated the workshops, found an aerial suspended from a telegraph pole, crossing two sets of power lines, before disappearing into a small shed divided into two sections, the front being a foreman’s office, the other separated by a locked door. This information was phoned through to 1ZB, where Mr. Scrimgeour immediately sought and secured an interview with the



officer then in charge of the Post and Telegraph Department in the city. In the presence of Mr. Coates, Mr. Scrimgeour asked if there was a transmitter in the shed, but was informed there was not. When the aerial was mentioned, the official replied that this had been used for receiving some shortwave football results. While this interview was taking place the two investigators were pressing their enquiries at the workshops, permission to view the interior of the shed being refused. However, the investigators and the foreman remained in a somewhat strained atmosphere for five hours while developments were moving in the city.

Scrimgeour communicated with the Departmental Head in Auckland, Mr. G. P. Finlay, chairman of the National Political Federation, the Mayor of Auckland, and the Auckland police. It was obvious that the situation was rapidly approaching a crisis, which finally came when the Mayor of Auckland stated that the shed at the workshops would be opened. The Mayor, a detective, officials of the Post and Telegraph Department, Mr. J. A. Lee, M.P., and Mr. Scrimgeour, with his two investigators watched while the foreman produced the key to the locked storeroom, opened the doors . . . and there it was, a powerful portable transmitter, showing signs of recent use, yet no one could give any explanation of how it arrived there. Conflicting explanations were made by the Auckland office and the Director-General of the Post and Telegraph Department in Wellington, who announced:

"It is now suggested that an experimental wireless set which was installed at the Newmarket telegraph workshops on Friday or Saturday last to enable the department to carry on investigations in connection with the proposed aircraft service, and for emergency purposes, was possibly, during tuning up, responsible for the interference with the broadcast from 1ZB on Sunday.

"It is now learned that the room has been locked all day owing to the occupant being called away on account of a fatal accident to his family, and the departure from Auckland of the installing engineer. If this assumption proves to be correct, to-night's broadcast will be free from interruption.

"The superintending engineer in Auckland is placing two radio inspectors in charge of the plant to-night to assure the public that the set will not be used, and is also arranging for



inspectors to watch for interference if it is attempted from other sources. . . .”

A radio engineer indicated flaws in this statement, pointing out that the operation of transmitters was governed by International Regulations which required a log to be kept showing when the transmitter was on the air, its frequency, power, and the name of the licensed operator. No such log was available.

Mr. Scrimgeour broadcast this statement from 1ZB:

“It may be considered by many that this is merely a matter which rests with the department, but the police now have it in hand and it will be expected that the persons responsible for the instructions being given, as well as those carrying them out, will be prosecuted. Mr. McNamara’s statement that this interference was purely accidental will be immediately discounted by those who are acquainted with the facts. In my opinion it is utter rubbish. There are too many coincidences in the whole matter for even myself, who always aims to see what good there is in everybody. If this matter has been accidental, why should every official have obstructed the investigation and by evasion and falsehood endeavoured to mislead us? One after another the Post and Telegraph officers contradicted each other. The man in charge of the radio department in Auckland stated to me in front of the Hon. J. G. Coates that the radio apparatus in this shed was a short-wave transmitter set erected for the purpose of getting football results. And when we entered we found a powerful transmitter, so can anyone blame us for thinking that something exceedingly sinister has taken place? If this was an accident and the department had nothing to hide, why this campaign of secrecy and evasion? We make no bones about holding the Post and Telegraph Department, including those high officials, guilty of interference with a broadcast which could have caused no one any offence. We leave it to listeners to judge for themselves.”

When this statement was referred to Mr. McNamara, Director-General of the Post and Telegraph, he said: “We have admitted it was our fault, and we are sorry. We have been perfectly frank in the matter.”

The following evening, when 1ZB was scheduled to give the broadcast that had led to the sensational incident of the jamming,



the technician at 1ZB transmitter was careful to check his equipment some time before transmission commenced, and found that the aerial had been tampered with, being earthed in such a way that had the transmitter been switched on, considerable damage would have resulted, the station being again forced off the air. However, repairs were made in time and the transmission commenced.

In the broadcast, Mr. Scrimgeour related the whole story of the recent happenings, then broadcast the talk which had been jammed the previous night. At this stage the jamming of 1ZB overshadowed other political issues, for it was realised that the whole story had not been made public, and although it was generally accepted that the jamming had been deliberately carried out by officers of the Post and Telegraph Department the question was "Who had issued the instructions?"

The incoming Government instituted a full enquiry into the incident, and although no details were made public, the findings were presented to Parliament by the Postmaster-General, the Hon. F. Jones.

"I find as a result of enquiries into the jamming of 1ZB that it has been established that instructions were issued by responsible authorities under the direction of the former Postmaster-General to take the steps which were adopted to put the station off the air on that occasion. No written instructions were issued, but apparently the Minister and officers of the Post and Telegraph Department discussed the matter and decided to take the action they did."

It was also revealed that the Commissioner of Police sent a coded telegram to the Auckland Superintendent of Police directing him to suspend any enquiry into the jamming, this instruction being issued prior to the election.

Mr. Adam Hamilton, when asked to comment on the findings, said:

"My instructions were that Mr. Scrimgeour had to be watched and that if he overstepped the mark he was to be stopped. I did not know what steps were being taken in that respect. . . . One thing I wish made clear. If there is any blame attachable to anyone I will take it. I do not wish any officers of the department to get into trouble. . . ."



It seems difficult to believe that officials and politicians would become involved in such an intrigue, but the entire incident proves the extent to which feelings and tempers can lead otherwise responsible people, and the unforeseen repercussions that can develop from such events.

It is a pleasure to have your letter of the 10th inst. received. The article referred to in your letter has been sent to the printer and will appear in the issue of the 17th inst. The article is entitled "The Medical Profession and the Public Health" and is by Dr. J. H. T. Moore, of the University of Chicago. The article is a very interesting one and should be read by all who are interested in the public health.

Very truly yours,  
J. H. T. Moore



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